Lines, Marks, and Drawings

THROUGH THE LENS OF ROGER BALLEN

Lines, Marks, and Drawings
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I'm basically an organizer.
I organize visual chaos into visual coherency.

Roger Ballen

Roger Ballen (b. 1950) has been shooting black-and-white film for nearly a half-century. A New York native, he has lived in South Africa for more than thirty years. Ballen's photographs of rural Afrikaners in their homes and urban-based "outsiders" in windowless rooms quickly became distinguished for their interior arrangements and the events that transpired among the people, animals, and furnishings within.

Ballen's interest in line—whether of coat hangers, electric wire, or marks made on walls—has been constant. His fascination with it, notes Craig Allen Subler, has resulted in "complex, theatrical photographs that are increasingly dominated by raw, graffiti-like drawings." In a luminous series of photographs that incorporate drawing on glass, the artist has come out from behind the camera lens to engage with line directly.

This book is the first to follow the development of line and drawing in Ballen's psychologically edgy and seductively beautiful work.

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THROUGH THE LENS OF ROGER BALLEN

Craig Allen Subler
Christine Mullen Kreamer

CONTRIBUTION BY
Robert JC Young

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Washington, DC

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Note to Reader: Unless otherwise captioned, all images are by Roger Ballen and are in the collection of the artist. In dimensions of artworks, height precedes width.

Cover: *Jump,* from the Asylum series, 2009; plate 43

Frontispiece: *Mimicry,* from the Boarding House series, 2005; plate 31

Frontispiece, Marking the Unconscious: *Twirling Wires,* from the Shadow Chamber series, 2001; plate 12

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Foreword

Art moves us. That is its power. It would be the rare individual who remains unmoved when confronting the beautifully composed and deliberately provocative images by South African photographer Roger Ballen.

Lines, Marks, and Drawings: Through the Lens of Roger Ballen is part of the National Museum of African Art's growing curatorial emphasis on photography, given the long history and strength of this medium on the African continent. Importantly, it is the first exhibition and publication that looks at the exploration of line throughout Ballen's photographic career. His fascination with line in his work—which ranges from twisted coat hangers and electrical cords to wall stains—becomes an integral part of complex juxtapositions of people, animals, objects, and drawings that Ballen uses to pull us into dialogue with his photographs. The artist believes that the open-ended conversations allow viewers to make up their own minds about what the images communicate.

Every exhibition and book project at the National Museum of African Art relies upon the contributions of many individuals. All of us at the museum are grateful to artist Roger Ballen for working closely with us on the exhibition and publication. He was supported by Marguerite Rossouw, artistic director, and Ans Erdmann, assistant, at Roger Ballen Photography, Johannesburg. Guest curator Craig Allen Subler is to be commended for proposing the unique perspective on line and drawing and for selecting outstanding photographs that trace this trajectory through more than four decades of Ballen's work. Robert JC Young has contributed a thoughtful, scholarly essay to this volume, for which we are grateful. Christine Mullen Kreamer, the museum's deputy director and chief curator, has provided sterling leadership throughout the process of imagining and then organizing an exhibition and publication on Roger Ballen's use of drawing in his photographs. I also wish to thank Migs Grove for her management of the editorial process, Jane McAllister for her editorial work, Lisa Vann for her exhibition design, and Kate Monsted for her assistance in every phase of the project. Finally, I would like to express my profound appreciation to all the other individuals who comprise the exceptional staff of the National Museum of African Art, each of whom brings particular expertise to the realization of our exhibitions, publications, programs, and outreach. I deeply value and commend my colleagues for their professionalism and commitment to their work and to the arts of Africa.

Johnnetta Betsch Cole, PhD
Director
National Museum of African Art

Lines, Marks, and Drawings

THROUGH THE LENS OF ROGER BALLEN

Craig Allen Subler

Over a lifetime an artist uses a variety of visual devices, motifs, and themes that he or she returns to time and again, each time exploring the ideas in different ways, often extending, revising, and rethinking them anew. In looking over an artist's career, one begins to see how seemingly disparate and creative trains of thought converged and transformed, and the retrospective provides opportunities for new insights into an artist's body of work. *Lines, Marks, and Drawings: Through the Lens of Roger Ballen* considers the South African artist's forty-plus years as a professional photographer through a new approach, namely, an examination of line and drawing in his photographs. Roger Ballen's oeuvre has evolved from portrait, documentary, and narrative photography that includes lines and marks to complex, theatrical photographs that are increasingly dominated by raw, graffiti-like drawings.

Drawing is the product of an intricate interplay of the eye, the mind, and the artist's hand. As such it is rarely associated with the camera, a mechanical device. In Ballen's early photographs street markings, posters, and graffiti show the initial signs of his interest in line and drawing. In later works electrical cords, barbed wire, twisted coat hangers, and marks on walls stand in for the drawn line.

Over time, drawing came to assume a more conspicuous role in Ballen's images. In his recent work the artist has directly integrated drawing into his theatrical settings to complement and energize his photographs; the drawing simultaneously communicates a sense of alienation, chaos, and disorder. In many of Ballen's images, "fact" is not distinguished from "fiction." In such works the human figure plays a supporting role as a collaborator who ultimately dissolves into the background.

Ballen's formal and conceptual work with the camera is at once expressive and intimate and, like his drawings for photographs, captures a flow of time. He moves without constraints between the two media, and in merging photography and drawing he is less interested in preserving the purity of each than how image and line impact the viewer to create what he refers to as a "chaotic breakdown." The counterbalance is his technical sophistication with the camera that produces compelling, exquisite images.

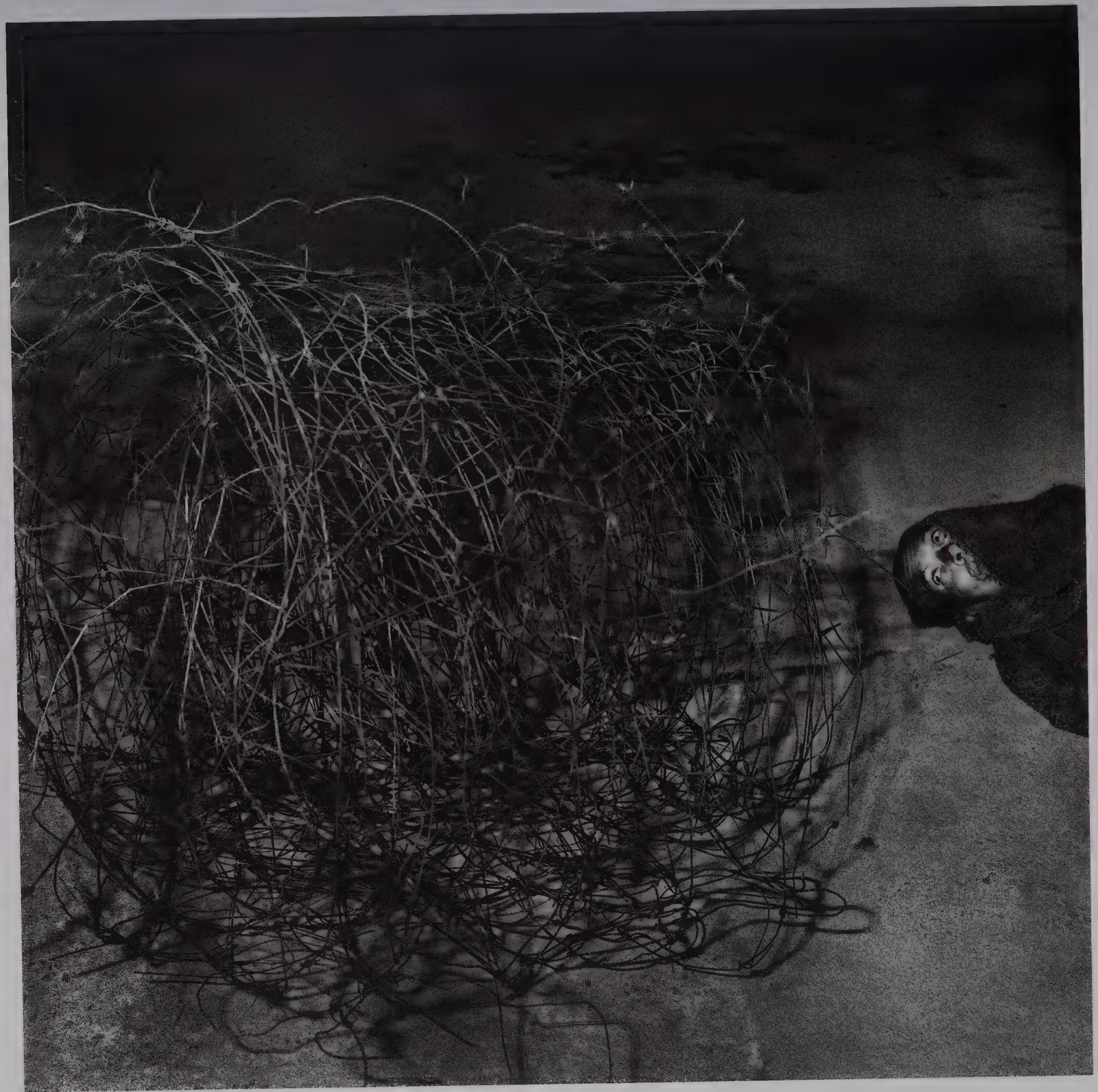
Rituals and theater permeate the claustrophobic confines of Ballen's surrealistic and recent photographic series Asylum. Drawing on the double-edged meaning of the term "asylum," the images—many of which are reproduced in this volume—

can be interpreted as evoking a place of hope and freedom as well as a locus of chaos, darkness, and despair. As in most of Ballen's photographs, meanings are at once complex and contradictory, tragic and comic. His images cause us to reach deep within ourselves as we try to make sense of what we see and feel. Ballen's shadowbox stage constructions have visually consumed his human collaborators, and we see them now only in fragments among the shards of apparitions and suggested past lives. The drawing that was only hinted at in the early documentary and portrait photographs now engulfs Ballen's work, increasingly focusing our attention on an internal rather than an external world.

In the most recent photographs illustrated in this volume, the figures have given way to pure drawing. A silent enigma envelops the works, as the photographic subject matter has become the drawing, and the human form is now a remnant, reduced to its most abstract. Here, the images have moved beyond graffiti and wall markings to form glyphlike drawings as stark and abstract as the street markings in the artist's early works.

Ballen's video collaboration in 2012 with the two members of the South African rap-rave group Die Antwoord for their song "I Fink U Freeky," has taken the artist in new directions. The musical and visual style of Die Antwoord (Afrikaans for "The Answer") incorporates elements from the Zef counter-culture movement, which is described as modern, trashy, and appropriating out-of-date, discarded cultural elements. In the award-winning music video, Ballen's graffiti-like drawings and sculptural installations are animated visually and aurally. He has constructed a complex scene that deftly merges the music and words of Die Antwoord to produce a visceral work that heightens the group's raw energy and driving beats.

Roger Ballen deftly balances rich tones and elegant textures with provocative imagery that is at once surprising and amusing, shocking and grotesque. He has allowed himself to be won over by the possibilities of integrating photography and drawing. He has expanded his repertoire and extended his visual language. By incorporating drawing into his photographic and video works, the artist has made not only a lasting contribution to the arts but also an equally powerful commentary about the human condition and its creative potential. Psychologically edgy and seductively beautiful images result.



Marking the Unconscious

THE ART OF ROGER BALLEN

Robert JC Young

Dark. The dinginess of a limbo world with no light, no windows, nothing but graffiti-covered cloth and smudged walls covered with crude drawings of ghostly faces; of spaces populated by wary, crouching, half-naked humans, broken toys, scavenging predators, birds, rats, mice, spiders, beetles, and dismembered claws. Roger Ballen's photography resonates like no other. It fascinates, disturbs, and repels. It breaks the boundaries of what photography has always done. Unreal, it no longer offers a mimetic representation of the actual, yet everything it portrays is real enough. Too real. Too close to something inside.

Any viewer of Ballen's photographs is propelled into playing the part of visitor to Ballen's gothic boarding houses, his inhospitable habitats that we gasp at and do not want to share. Here, as in the uncanny, much comes to light that should have remained hidden. The secreted reveals itself; the unimaginable finds itself realized.

What do we see and discover in the photographs and in ourselves when we look at Ballen's images? An absence of distinction between the human and the animal. Here, where humans seem caged or enclosed while animals run free, human and animal live in a different relation to each other. The place of the human is as marginal as that of the mice and rats that scurry across the floor.

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.[1]

This bleak shell of creation is entirely interior, an inscaped purgatorial landscape of dispassionate indifference, edgy surreal encounters, and unhomely solitude. The few images taken outside are of surfaces on the ground, for Ballen's camera is always looking down, never to the sky. Inside, the gray, dank chambers provide no windows, no vegetation, no natural light; we look into a void, a realm of shadows. What we find there is what the images find in us.

The photography of Roger Ballen presents a two-dimensional space of surfaces having neither perspective nor depth. Without visual focus, it is somewhat akin to color field painting, leaving the eye to wander among the contiguous textures with no sense of where the center of an image might be. Then, as the eye forages about, it discovers, lying at the foot of a zebra skin, for example, the upside-down head of a child turning away from a bare rib cage of a huge animal, or a human face comically peeping out from behind a staring white mask, or a grinning puppy crouching beside a doll that lies with its face down in a wire basket. Every space is filled, but the whole lacks human relation. While formal repetition is apparent in echoing shapes, weaves, and grainy juxtapositions, nothing connects to anything else save by its particular position. In this simulacrum of the chaotic detritus of the unconscious, where the parts link together and mimic one another, they do so only at the aesthetic level of composition; the photographs show no warmth or affinity among the people or between humans and animals.[2] The grim humor of Ballen's

FIG. 1. *Serpent Lady*, from the Asylum series, 2009 (Plate 40)

imagery forces us into a nightmare of solitude, seclusion, loneliness, isolation, fear, perplexity, menace, and violence. The totality of vision is remorseless, unforgiving, and without exception.

In photographic terms Ballen's technique can be characterized as "deadpan," an aesthetic that first became popular in landscape and portrait photography in the 1980s. He shows or references objects from everyday life and its materials, but he offers no meaning to the viewer, no self-interpretation. The photographer remains emotionally detached; he presents no obvious point. The images are simply there, displaying items juxtaposed to others without signification. This does not, on the other hand, mean that the photographs do not create affect, for as in all that is gothic, they do so even if they proffer no comprehensible semantic content: they show rather than tell. When we leave them behind we tend to describe how they made us feel, not what they were about. They involve nothing more than the performance of what appears before us, producing an uncontrollable effect upon the sensibility of the viewer. In such a way Ballen breaks down the troubled link between representation and the real, for the images do not represent anything apart from what they show us. They do not point us to a world beyond the image we see; they do not try to take us elsewhere. What we see is what they are. Instead of transporting us, they send us inside ourselves.

It follows that the photographs are without desire. While they generate in the viewer repeated but various forms of unease and jolts of fascinated repulsion, they produce no corresponding release of forbidden desire. Sexuality, where it appears in Ballen's work, is grim, grimy, and dark. Consider, for example, a photograph from 2009 (fig. 1), in which we are shown a painting of a woman's torso, her breasts turned into a

face reminiscent of those in Pablo Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907 (The Museum of Modern Art, New York). Her drooping tongue turns out, on closer inspection, to be the head of a reptile. Behind, drawings on a blackboard depict a distressed graffiti face and a stick-figure chicken with claws. The central image is framed by a screen of upholstered cushions scrawled with black tadpole-like creatures and, in the center of each, gaping, white, masklike faces looking out in horror or indifference.

Or take another work, this one from 2010 (fig. 2), in which a bemused, noseless doll-boy, as armless as the classical torsos on either side of him, sits with a swollen white penis between the legs of a body whose head is made up of a picture of Sophia Loren flanked by two images of full-breasted women. The central figure is bordered by columns of smiling stick figures, each one of whom is being crucified on a cross. The only desire that manifests itself here is that of avenging ghosts and shadows, more active than any natural agency. In *Threat,* 2011 (fig. 3), we confront a girl lying in a bed who cowers before the menacing beak of a bird of prey. Both, however, are overshadowed by a huge, round-faced mask, with additional faces peering from its blackened eyes. This ancestral ghost overwhelms the human and the animal beneath it, reducing them to a minor drama; the roughly drawn face seems more powerfully alive than either. Drawing begins to take over the image. So, too, in Ballen's photograph *Antithesis,* 2005 (fig. 4), the ghastly face of a smiling one-eared monkey-doll peers down at us over a flat canvas of charcoaled, ghostly, inverted shapes that stare out from below.

The drawings transform the medium of the photograph. Time has disappeared. In some of Ballen's images, time is registered only minimally, in the form of a dove landing or a rat running past, or a rat, spider, or beetle being held by the hand or running free. These "caught" moments of animal life are what make the image a work of art rather than a photograph of an installation. But many other of Ballen's scenes do not record a "decisive moment," as described by Henri Cartier-Bresson[3]; they do not capture time's momentary fragment. In those cases, Ballen has removed time from the photograph, taken out the "indexical" quality of reference to the real that, as Roland Barthes suggests, creates the essence of photography.[4] Time, the constitutive element of the photographic image, has been eliminated, which is not to say

FIG. 2. *Repentance*, from the Asylum series, 2010 (Plate 50)

FIG. 3. *Threat*, from the Asylum series, 2011 (Plate 37)

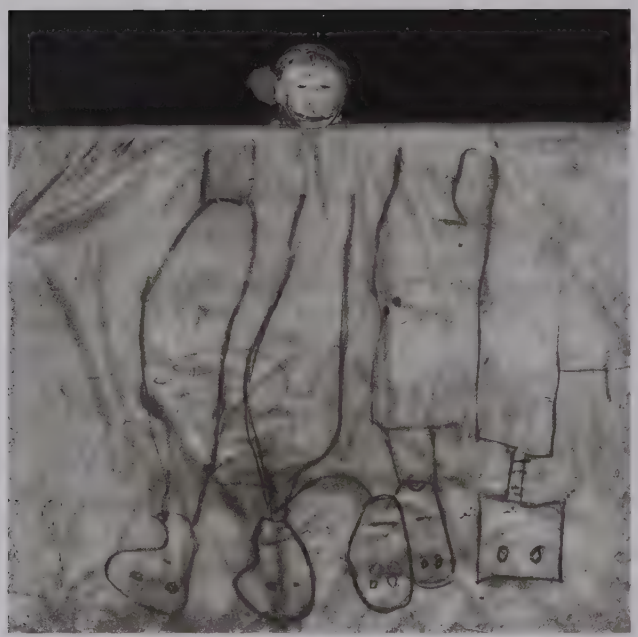


FIG. 4. *Antithesis*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2005 (Plate 27)

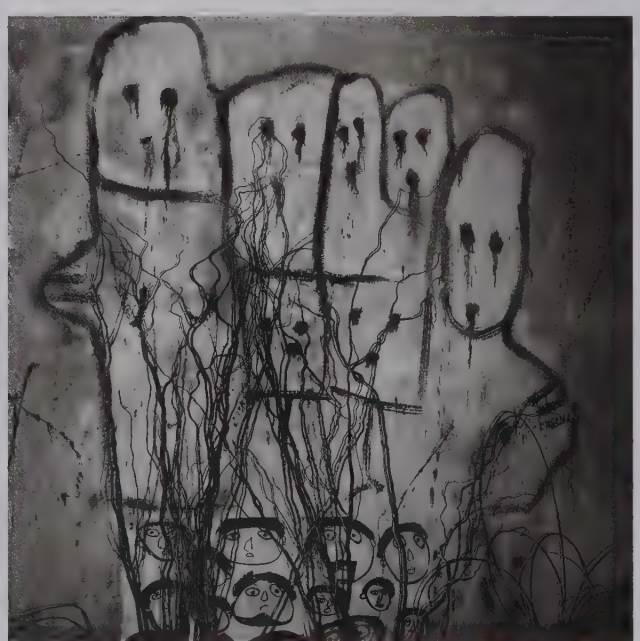


FIG. 5. *Funeral Rites*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2004 (Plate 28)

that Ballen's are "timeless," but rather that the element of time has simply been removed. With Ballen, the photograph no longer signals that the "event" it portrays is past and gone, that its caught moment of time has tantalizingly vanished. As in the unconscious, time does not figure in his images, and its absence increases the intensity of the nightmarish vision. In the case of *Antithesis,* what we have in its place is a monkey-doll resting his head above a sheet of five inverted charcoal-drawn faces, four of them tenuously attached to elongated balloonlike bodies. The focus of the photograph, toward which the monkey-doll's gaze directs us, has become a strange, anonymous drawing.

In *Funeral Rites,* 2004 (fig. 5), the ghosts, now upright, rise with bleeding eyes (like the demonic owls in Francisco de Goya's *Capricho 43* of 1799[5]) behind a host of paranoid cartoon faces imprisoned by twigs, wire, and barbed wire. Here, drawing is not presented as a medium in the realm of fine art. Instead, it becomes part of material reality, aligned and interacting with objects such as bare twigs or wires, the silhouettes of which trace patterned lines onto the canvas of the wall. Flattened toward two dimensions, Ballen's images are developed into collages of drawings, lines, marks, and wires, held together and composed through the frame of the photograph.

How can we begin to understand the dynamics of what Ballen has produced here? The presence of masks and masklike faces has a long history in art and photography. Ever since Alfred Stieglitz began photographing his 291 Gallery displays of African art for his magazine *Camera Work* in 1914, photographers have been fascinated by African masks and the possibilities of their visual power and emotive beauty.[6] Modernist painters such as the cubist Pablo Picasso or the German expressionist Emil Nolde often featured "primitive" African-style masks. The psychic charge of Ballen's faces, however, more obviously evokes that of Edvard Munch's *The Scream,* 1893 (*Der Schrei der Natur* [The Scream of Nature]), above all the sexless screamer's agonized expression, its face painted with dots for the nose, and a gaping, screaming hole for a mouth.

Whereas Picasso's, Nolde's, or Munch's paintings burn fiercely with color, Ballen's images take us into the unforgiving obscurity of his chiaroscuro creations in black and white, a theater of shadows that, at times, seems to come close to the

Kafkaesque imaginary prisons in Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Le Carceri* (The Prisons), 1761.[7] Like Piranesi's fantastical labyrinthine dungeons, Ballen's gray subterranean domain hints at a nightmarish psychic echo of his own times: of the social existence in fortress houses in gated communities that are not communities; of the distant, distressed shacks in shantytowns that provide the servants to service and support them; of the lives of people who have lost the habitual forms of sociality; of the repressed memories but enduring social unconscious of apartheid.

To understand Ballen's work solely in terms of that South African context, however, would be to locate its meaning too easily, transpose it too safely, for those outside South Africa into a specific political arena that would leave the rest of humanity untouched. Ballen's photographs speak to us beyond the place of their production, signaling something deeper and more far-reaching than their local milieu. The dislocated spaces in which they situate us hint at a condition far more disturbing and global, namely, a breakdown of the relationship between human beings and their environment. Here, animals do not live in natural surroundings but rather in the strange rats' alleys of the windowless boarding houses. In other ways, though, humans live here in a closer alliance with nature: what might look to us like dirt, for them is also just the earth. In negative and positive ways, connections with ecology have become inverted, while human and animal alike cower under the penumbra of chaotic forces that seem beyond their control.

FIG. 6. László Moholy-Nagy (American, b. Hungary, 1895–1946), *Self-Portrait*, 1925, gelatin silver print, 37.3 x 27.3 cm (14⅝ x 10¾ in.). George Eastman House; museum purchase, ex-collection Sybil Moholy-Nagy, 81:2163:0020

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FROM ART PHOTOGRAPHY TO ART BRUT

Roger Ballen has remarked that he belongs to the last generation of photographers who shoot with film cameras and print in black and white. By the same token Ballen also affiliates himself to the tradition—which goes back to the very inception of photography, with Edward Weston as its most articulate spokesman in the twentieth century[8]—that conceives of photography as a form of art. Despite its ability to capture the real world apparently as it is or was, and despite its use for the purposes of documenting science, police work, history, or news, photographers have also fought to identify their art as an aesthetic form comparable to any other.

Photographers since the nineteenth century have been reaffirming that stance in different ways, whether Julia Margaret Cameron's theatrical tableaux or the refined aesthetic formalism and abstraction of twentieth-century modernists such as László Moholy-Nagy or Aaron Siskind.[9] Moholy-Nagy's abstract photograms (fig. 6), together with his interest in the effects of juxtaposed and layered surfaces, and Siskind's abstracted peeling walls (fig. 7) could be said to foreshadow important aspects of Ballen's work.

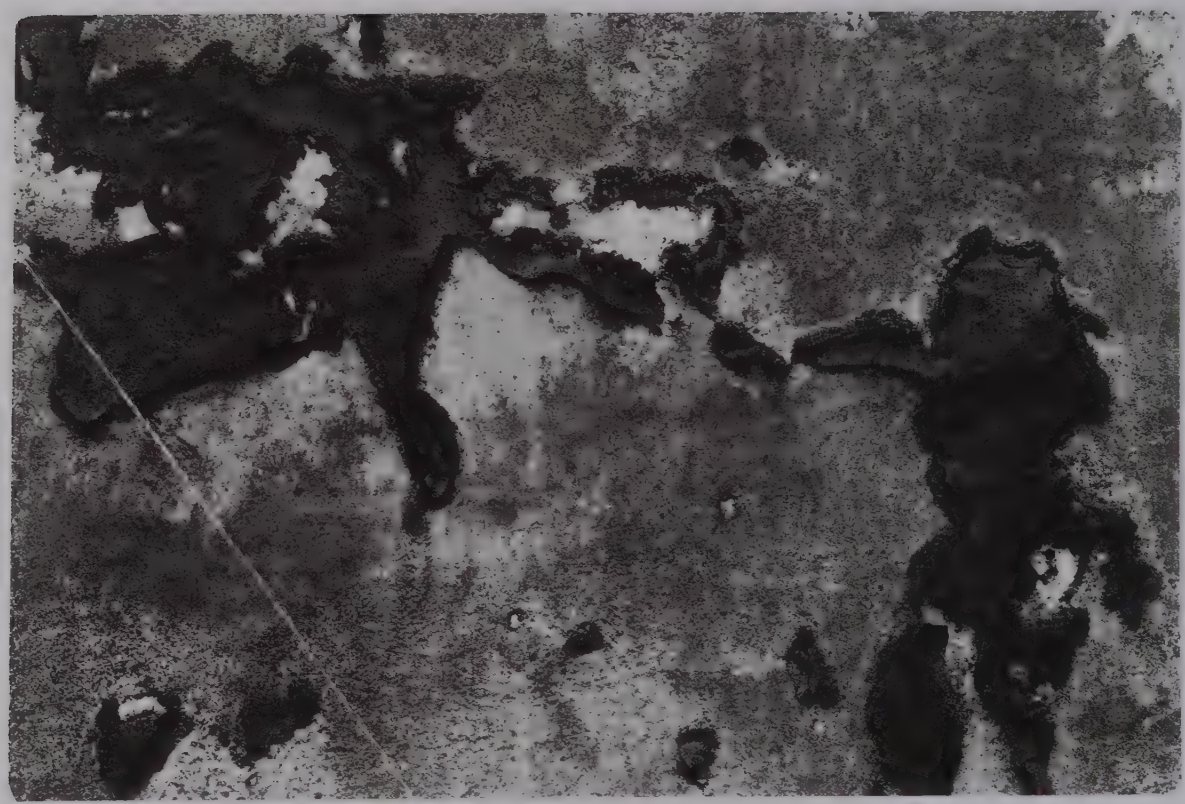


FIG. 7. Aaron Siskind (American, 1903–1991), *West Street, New York 9,* 1950, gelatin silver print, 11 x 16.4 cm (4 5/16 x 6 7/16 in.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; gift of Muriel Kallis Newman, 1996, 1996.58.43

© Aaron Siskind Foundation; image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, image source: Art Resource, NY

The modernist impulse was prompted in part by the invention of the Kodak camera and the facility it created for ordinary people to make photography integral to daily life. In the twenty-first century the revolution in photography has happened all over again, this time in an extreme way: it has been not so much the invention of digital cameras and the ability to manipulate images digitally, as was initially thought, but rather the capacity for putting cameras into every device that we use, by means of which we can record all facets of our progress through day or night and share it on social media. In this context professional photography, always needing to be distinguished from that of the "amateur," has moved into new registers. Ballen, however, has gone in the opposite route to most.

Since the transformation of painting in the 1960s, when artists such as Richard Hamilton and Andy Warhol began to integrate photographs from popular culture into their work, either directly or by repainting or silk-screening photographic images, the borders between photography and other art forms have broken down. Many artists today routinely use mixed media, video, and photographic images in their work. Yet many photographers have continued to claim that art photography has a separate, demarcated space, holding to the uniqueness of the photographic process. While many art forms have incorporated photography, photography as fine art is still largely considered a pure and distinct area that does not integrate other forms, beyond claiming art's institutional status. While a photograph is increasingly conceptualized as

a work of art, the idea of photography as art remains fixed on the concept of art before it moved into mixed media. Photographers have responded by developing new modes for the photographic idiom, such as deadpan, as described above, or serial photography, in which the isolation of images as individual objects of aesthetic contemplation is transformed into a dynamic narrative. Another is photography that reflects self-consciously on its role as representation, so that the content of the image is not a moment of lived reality, but rather the ubiquitous presence of photographic imagery in modern life.

While Ballen's work moves into the realm of art, its dynamic affiliates with a different genealogy: his work is more directly inspired by art brut, or outsider art. Instead of pursuing, as the modernists did, the primitive as a means for regenerating Western art, Jean Dubuffet, creator of the term "art brut," rejected the aesthetics of high art altogether. He focused instead on the art of those who worked outside the aesthetic tradition of the established art market to produce art that did not count as art, that is, the art created by the insane, prisoners, children, and others placed in a peripheral position to mainstream society and its culture.

Ballen's provocative work has all the rawness of outsider art. In terms of painting, his photographs come closest to the harsh self-portraits by African American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat of the early 1980s (fig. 8). However much Basquiat was appropriated by the art market, he remained an outsider in his art and life. His origins as a painter of graffiti also suggest links with photographers who have celebrated outsider art, particularly the Hungarian photographer Georges Brassaï. Though best known for his photographs of Paris by night, Brassaï also developed an interest in the anonymous graffiti that he found on walls in the street in working-class districts of cities. It is in Brassaï's raw images of faces, skulls, masks, and hearts (fig. 9) that we can find one of the closest links to Ballen's photography. Brassaï's presentation of graffiti was not articulated with the sophisticated critical apparatus of Dubuffet, but his photographs that focus on the strange, compelling beauty of anonymous graffiti nevertheless make their own point about the power of contemporary outsider art.

FIG. 8. Jean-Michel Basquiat (American, 1960–1988), *Self-Portrait as a Heel*, 1982, acrylic and oil stick on canvas, 127 x 101.6 cm (50 x 40 in.); BASQU 1982.0076

© The Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat/ADAGP, Paris, ARS, New York 2013; image courtesy Gagosian Gallery, photo by Robert McKeever

OUTSIDER ART, INSIDE

Ballen first came to prominence as a photographer with *Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa* (1986), a book of photographs of rural South Africa that he took during the time of apartheid. Unlike most South African photographers of that period, such as David Goldblatt, Ballen never attempted to photograph or document apartheid and its injustices directly.[10] As an immigrant, Ballen looked at the country as an outsider. As a geologist, he encountered landscapes that were not the usual urban environments in which the conflicts of apartheid were most notably staged and played out. Rather, Ballen showed us the forgotten hinterlands or outlands where poor rural whites lived under the imagined benefits of the

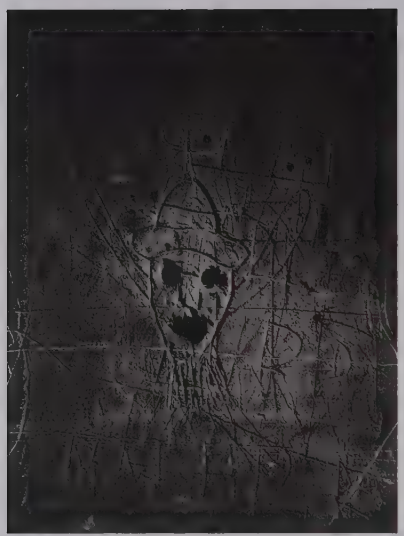


FIG. 9. Georges Brassaï (French, 1899–1984), *Graffiti from Series VIII, Magic*, c. 1933–56, silver gelatin print.

© The Brassaï Estate RMN; courtesy Edwynn Houk Gallery

policies of the regime. Many of the images documented the formal beauty of old colonial buildings, but others demonstrated a very different aesthetic: these were of rural Afrikaners, whom Ballen portrayed dispassionately, without comment or obvious involvement. The people he depicted looked strange, their faces often contorted or seemingly demented, their appearance apparently the product of inbreeding or centuries of rural poverty.

With *Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa* (1994), Ballen was criticized for publishing what were considered to be negative images during the optimistic era of the "new South Africa," at which point Ballen, as he described it, walked through one of the doors he had photographed and never came out.[11] The images in *Lines, Marks, and Drawings* are largely drawn from what he found inside. Ballen preferred to remain with the outsiders whom he photographed, presenting their inner world, demonstrating that he was more interested in and sympathetic to their marginalized lives than in the mainstream representations of the new South Africa. Enclosed within unidentified buildings, Ballen developed a new aesthetic, the product of intimate experience with the families and home interiors of the people he portrayed. Despite the precarious poverty of their way of life, the simplicity of their houses, and the minimal comforts of their domestic arrangements, Ballen registered a kind of disturbing visual beauty that permeates the strange residues of their lives and belongings. In particular he saw walls, drawings, textures, wires, lines. His work is inspired by and developed from the outsider art they had created.

Many of the images shown in this volume, such as *Eugene on the Phone,* 2000 (fig. 10), can be described as portraits, but they are likenesses in which the relation of the people portrayed to the dynamic surfaces of their surroundings is as important as the people themselves. Instead of a process in which the photographer takes portraits in a formal way, the images make clear that Ballen's subjects are themselves actively participating in the production. The photographer whom Ballen comes closest to here is his fellow American Ralph Eugene Meatyard. In the 1960s, Meatyard created a disquieting photographic fantasy of people, particularly young people, with masked faces in improvised scenes, pictured against the backdrop of their own impoverished but bleakly beautiful environments. Ballen takes the implicit aesthetics of Meatyard's work, as he does with Brassaï's graffiti, into a new dimension.

In *Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar,* 1984 (fig. 11), Ballen for the first time isolated the elements of what was to become his own distinctive idiom. *Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar* presents a domestic interior in which the bed and Victorian marble-and-tiled table beside it, cluttered with everyday objects—a photograph frame, transistor radio, medicines, a fallen clock—provide the foil for a blank white wall across which hang crossed electric wires, a lamp, a key, together creating a formal composition. The human beings who created it, however, are entirely absent. The image becomes a theater of still life or, perhaps more appropriately in the French idiom, of *nature morte*: a theater of "dead" life, of the bits that humans produce and leave behind.

In *Twirling Wires,* 2001 (fig. 12), one of Ballen's most powerful images, these elements are re-created more abstractly: here the wide-eyed man, his hand covering his mouth, looks up fearfully at the dark cloud of barbed wire that floats above him. The dirty wall, the sacking in which he has wrapped himself, and the blackness that stretches away to his left suggest the wretchedness of the down-and-out in the board-

FIG. 10. *Eugene on the Phone*, from the Outland series, 2000 (Plate 15)

ing house, refuge, or squatter's dwelling, the subaltern milieu in which Ballen has placed himself and with which he identifies. When the inner core of the hovering wires seems to begin to change into the form of a skeletal face, it is hard not to get the feeling that the twirling wires are not only outside but also inside—what is going on in the man's head.

Ballen's photography is inside and outside at once. Just as the man seen in *Twirling Wires* cowers at the foot of the image, the role of the human being in Ballen's photographs is gradually reduced from center stage to the margins, so that the human subjects become just one more prop among the many others that have been scavenged from the flea market or the garbage dump, often showing merely a part of themselves—a disembodied hand, arms, a leg, waving hands. The stares of human subjects are subsumed into the ghostly visages that dominate the photographs, which are populated with half-destroyed children's toys, dolls, animal skins with strong linear markings, carcasses, and scavenging rats balancing on their tails. But the faces, even if no longer those of human beings, overpower all else: indistinguishably childish or "primitive" drawings, dolls' faces, those torn from magazines, masks, ghost faces, their eyes blank and staring, or eyes that have more faces staring out from inside them, joined now by the lidless eyes of birds, flying, perched, swimming.

LINES, MARKS, AND DRAWINGS

Ballen has done something radical and extraordinary; he has not just developed an art photography no longer concerned with the artist's vision of the real, as in the case of Weston.[12] Rather, Ballen presents to us an unreal, which embodies his

FIG. 11. *Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar*, from the Dorps series, 1984 (Plate 20)

imagined, mental landscapes of the human periphery. Beyond this, the artist has reversed Hamilton's or Warhol's move from the point of view of photography. Instead of bringing photography into painting, Ballen has brought painting and drawing into photography to produce an undecidably mixed medium. He has broken down the boundaries between photography and the other arts, taken photography out of its self-isolation as a form. Ballen becomes ever more interested in what earlier constituted the backdrops to his portraits, particularly the interior walls of the houses, with their simple whitewashed surfaces; transformed, they are now covered with pockmarks, smudges, scribbles, and children's drawings and are populated by masks, small, rough pictures, frames that have lost their images, and, above all, electric wires that are stretched and hooked precariously across the surfaces to create shapes and patterns that generate a formal beauty.

What was originally just background increasingly becomes the subject of the photographs; the chance aspect of the visual arrangements of the walls is gradually developed into an aesthetic in itself. Electric wires, wire coat hangers often bent so that they look like thin faces with arms, barbed wire, bars, cages, and nets all produce an emphasis on lines that fill the images and echo against another kind of line, those drawn on the wall by absent human hands, grotesque graffiti, and strange childish faces. The fault lines on the walls become the subject of the images, as if they were obscure rock formations. Such elements are more extreme in some of Ballen's works, in which we are shown stage sets, the uninterpretable visual drama of which unfolds before our eyes. In them, line moves into drawing and painting.

Like his human subjects, drawing in Ballen's work is identified with the margins and peripheries: the lines on the

FIG. 12. *Twirling Wires*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2001 (Plate 12)

street, graffiti on the door, dirt marks, scrapings from the claws of animals, scratches on the wall, casual crayon marks of a child above a bed, of hearts, of clowns. Scribbling is mirrored by the lines of bars, wires, coat hangers, dead twigs, or the lined bones of skeletons. The hands that draw are pictured only once—in *Man Drawing Chalk Faces,* 2000 (fig. 13). Here, the man, naked from the waist up, unshaven, with bad teeth, dirty fingernails, and one hand at his crotch, turns to the camera with his mouth gaping open as if caught unaware. The curiously shaped nostrils of the drawn faces on the bare walls mirror his own; unexpectedly and eerily, the faces are smiling. Otherwise we see not the graphic artist at work but rather, only arbitrary patterns of marks made by disjointed hands in the past.

Drawing intrudes into the image: increasingly, the photographs are of sketches or of installations covered with outlines, of walls enveloped with cloth or crumpled paper, where lines and varied textures interact on shifting surfaces strewn with gaping faces. Together with the face, Ballen concentrates on the face of the surface, in surfaces that form faces, and in the mutuality of relations between faces and surfaces. We can see this dynamic in his early photographs of streets, such as *Zebra Lines, India,* 1973 (fig. 14), in which the photographer's eye picks out a stunning ensemble of interacting shades and textures juxtaposed against one another on the flatness of the roadside. Part of the power of the image remains the traditional admiration that the viewer feels for the photographer's ability to see such visual possibilities in the banality of the edge of a street.

Ballen's abiding interest in surfaces is intimately related to his preoccupation with drawing, with marks on surfaces of all kinds, with drawings created by a kind of surface scouring and

FIG. 13. *Man Drawing Chalk Faces,* from the Outland series, 2000 (Plate 9)

FIG. 14. *Zebra Lines, India,* 1973 (Plate 6)

layered upon one another. Lines and surface increasingly take over the photograph, so that the photograph becomes a way of drawing. It is as if the wires and graffiti on the wall have become the lines of the pen and the brush. As with all the drawings in Ballen's photographs, the author is left obscure; the drawings are photographed as if they have been found by chance. But they have not. The composition is careful and complex. In a small number of images, such as *Divided Self,* 2007 (fig. 15), a photograph has become pure drawing. Notice here how the drawn line is balanced against the fuzzy shape that looks at once like half a face and the outlined shadow of a head. It is as if the charcoal or chalk faces that form the backdrop to so many of Ballen's images have been abstracted to become the very subject of the images. They have transformed into pure surface textures, such as the puckered paint on glass plastered with tape in another work, *Injured* (pl. 54), from the same series.

"Photography is an immediate reaction," observed Cartier-Bresson, "drawing a meditation."[13] Are these images, in fact, still "photographs" in the conventional sense at all? It seems as if they are not quite installations, not quite drawings, yet not quite photographs either. Ballen has turned the photograph inside out. Instead of presenting images of the real, his photographs have come to delineate and describe the textured traces of a new medium of drawing that extends the forms of reality that photography can capture.

NOTES

1. From T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 15.
2. Unless it be the relationship modeled on László Krasznahorkai and Max Neumann's *Animalinside* (New York: New Directions/Sylph Editions, 2011), a favorite book of Roger Ballen's.
3. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Mind's Eye: Writings on Photography and Photographers,* ed. Michael L. Sand (New York: Aperture, 1999), 20–43.
4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

FIG. 15. *Divided Self*, from the Apparitions series, 2007 (Plate 52)

5. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (Spanish, 1746–1828), *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, plate 43 of *Los Caprichos* (The Caprices), 1799, etching, aquatint, drypoint, and burin, 21.5 x 15 cm (8⁷⁄₁₆ x 5⅞ in.). Plate 43 was originally planned to be the frontispiece to Goya's volume, which includes eighty illustrated leaves.

6. A recent exhibition on the theme was *African Art, New York, and the Avant-Garde*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, November 27, 2012–September 2, 2013.

7. Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Italian, 1720–1778), *Le Carceri* (The Prisons), second state, 1761.

8. Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," *Complete Photographer* 9, no. 49 (1943): 3200–3206.

9. László Moholy-Nagy, "From Pigment to Light" (1933), in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 339–48.

10. See Tamar Garb, "Figures and Fictions: South African Photography in the Perfect Tense," in Tamar Garb, ed. *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* (London: V&A Publishing, 2011).

11. Ballen, private communication with the author.

12. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

13. Cartier-Bresson, *Mind's Eye*, 45.

I started photographing graffiti walls in the late 1960s. . . .
The wall is like the artist's canvas. . . . It's the stage
before the actors walk on.

Roger Ballen

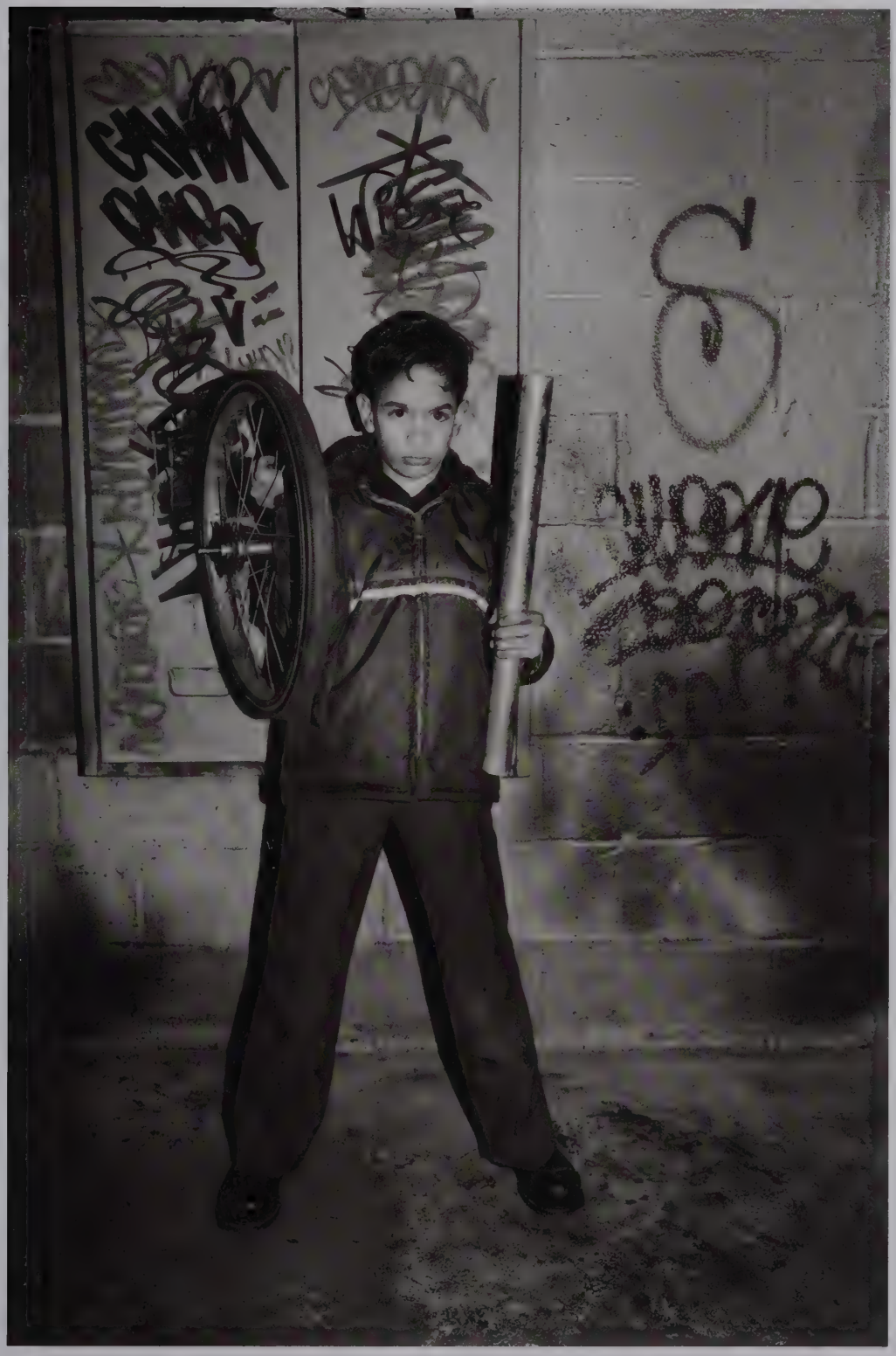


PLATE 1 *Gladiator, USA*, from the Boyhood series, 1977
Silver gelatin print, 25.5 x 20.25 cm (10 x 8 in.)

PLATE 2 *School Days, Tanzania*, 1974
Silver gelatin print, 25.5 x 20.25 cm (10 x 8 in.)

PLATE 3 *Inverse, India*, 1973
Silver gelatin print, 25.5 x 20.25 cm (10 x 8 in.)

PLATE 4 *Cross Roads, India*, 1973
Silver gelatin print, 20.25 x 25.5 cm (8 x 10 in.)

PLATE 5 *Curve Line, India*, 1973
Silver gelatin print, 20.25 x 25.5 cm (8 x 10 in.)

PLATE 6 *Zebra Lines, India*, 1973
Silver gelatin print, 20.25 x 25.5 cm (8 x 10 in.)

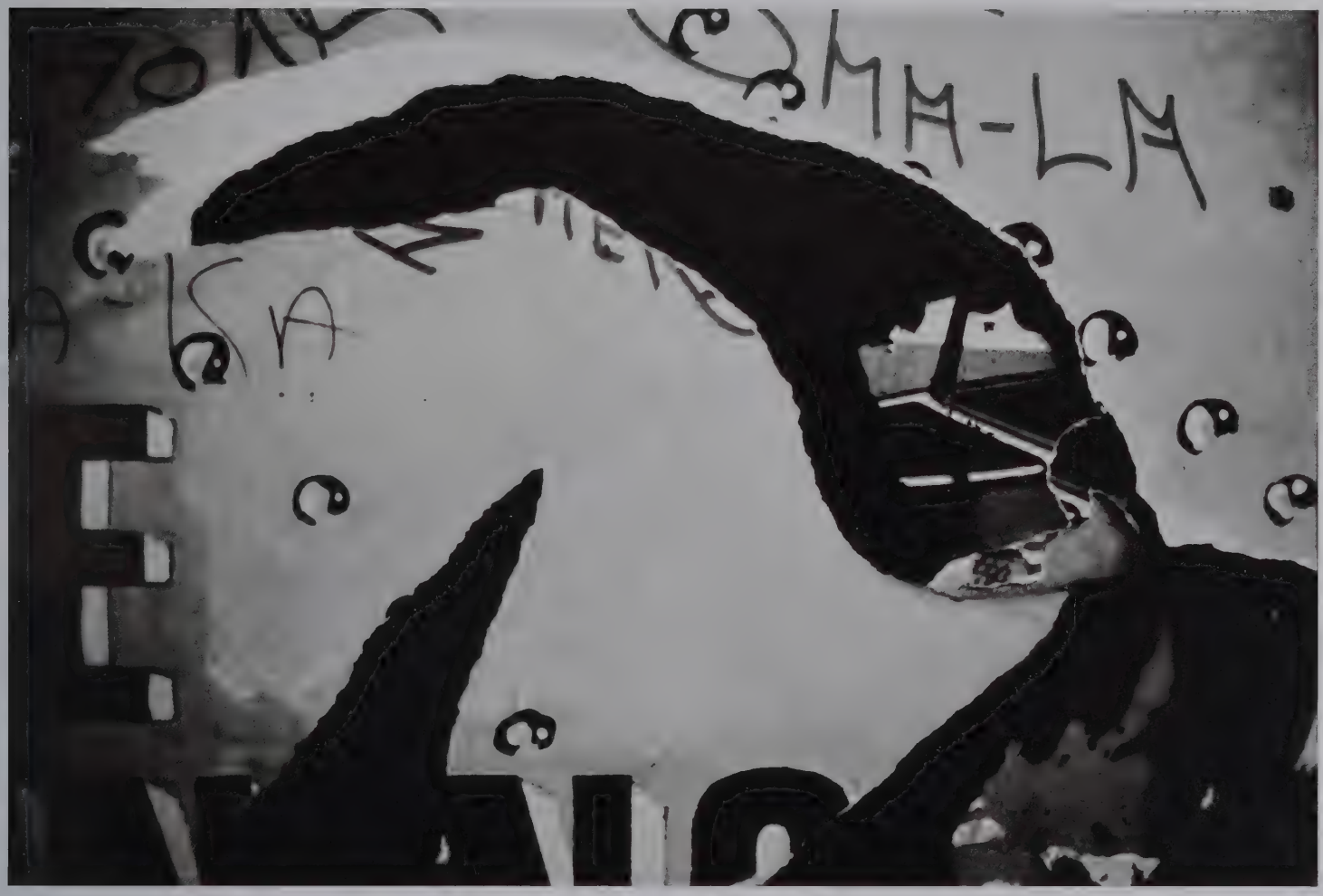


PLATE 7 *Graffiti, USA*, 1973
Silver gelatin print, 20.25 x 25.5 cm (8 x 10 in.)

PLATE 8 *Little Girl, Ecuador*, 1981
Silver gelatin print, 25.5 x 25.5 cm (10 x 10 in.)

I always say that a photograph began before I began
making it, deep down in some part of my mind.
It formed before my consciousness about it was formed.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 9 *Man Drawing Chalk Faces*, from the Outland series, 2000
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 10 *Boy with Guns, Western Transvaal*, from the Platteland series, 1993
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 11 *Adolescent in Bedroom*, from the Outland series, 1998
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 12 *Twirling Wires*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2001
Silver gelatin print, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in.)

PLATE 13 *Head below Wires*, from the Outland series, 1999
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 14 *Birdwoman*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2003
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 15 *Eugene on the Phone*, from the Outland series, 2000
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

The room becomes a place of the mind. If you're going back to the same room all the time, you're actually able to find a relationship between what's inside and what's outside.

Roger Ballen

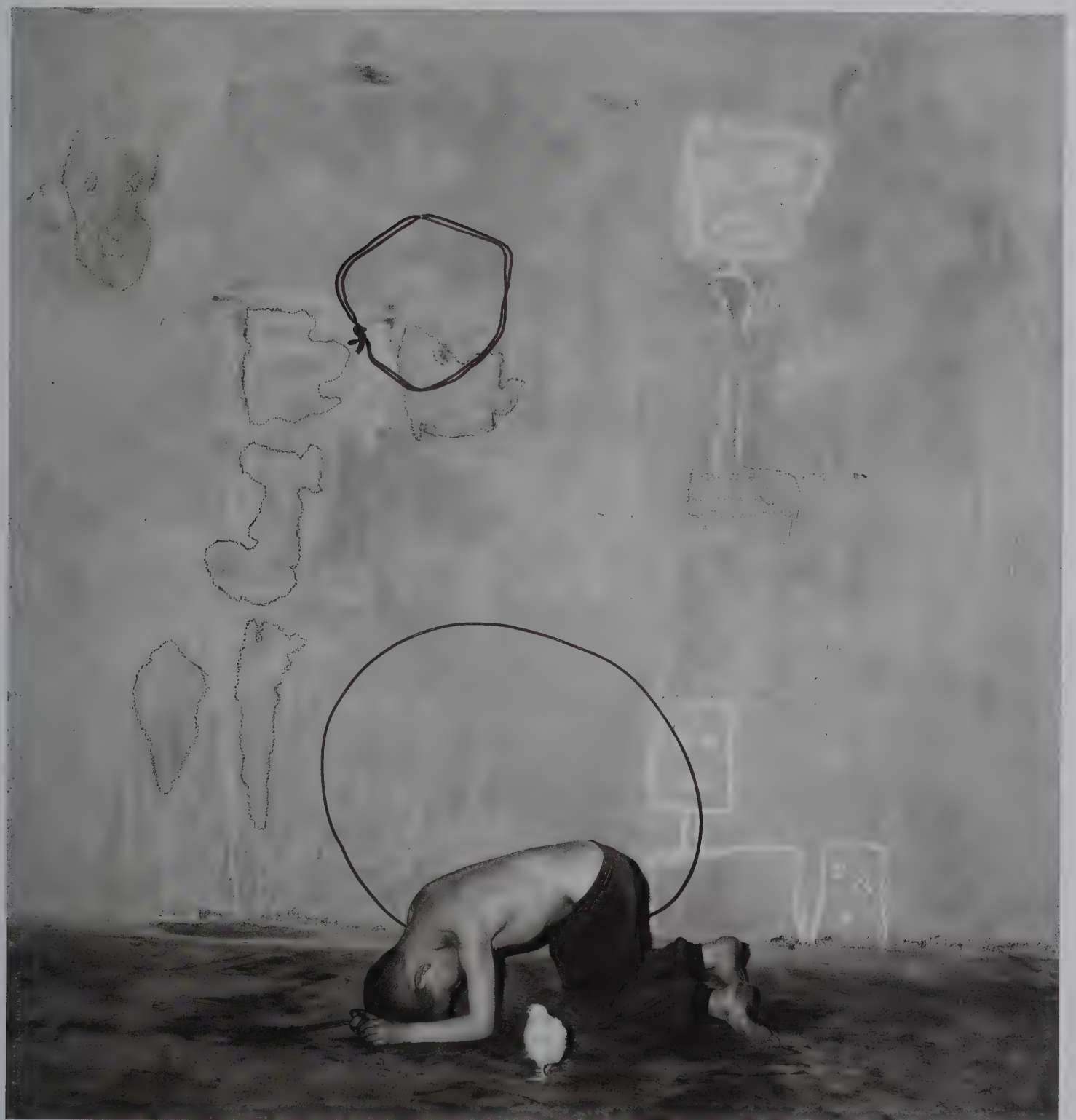


PLATE 16 *Invitation*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2003
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 17 *Scavenging*, from the Boarding House series, 2004
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 18 *Skeletal*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2005
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 19 *Spinning*, from the Asylum series, 2006
Archival pigment print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

I'm basically an organizer. I organize visual chaos into visual coherency.

Roger Ballen

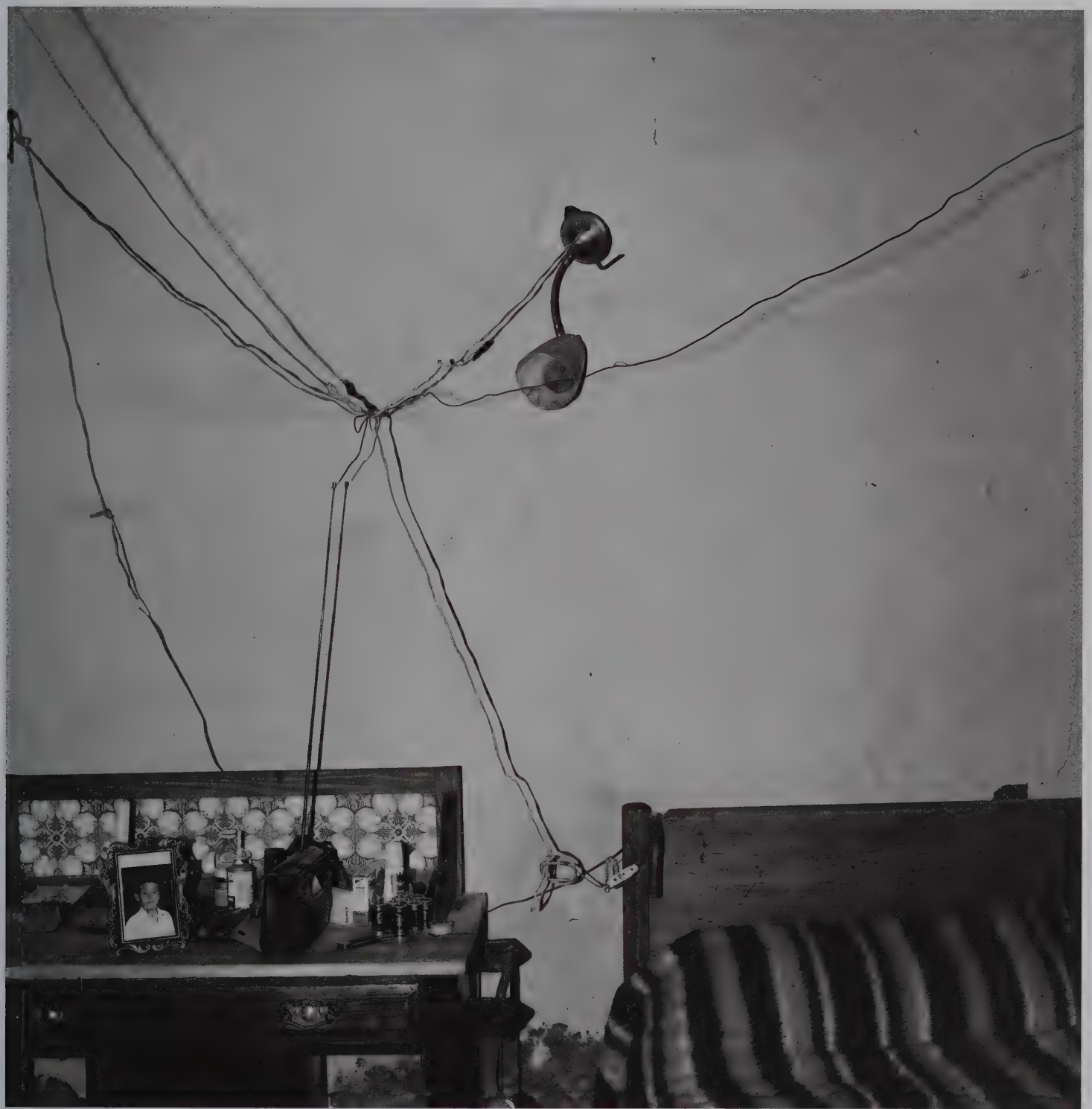


PLATE 20 *Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar*, from the Dorps series, 1984
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 21 *Configuration*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2003
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 22 *Mirage*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2003
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 23 *Children's Bedroom Wall*, from the Outland series, 2000
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 24 *Forsaken*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2005
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 25 *Place of the Upside Down*, from the Outland series, 2004
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

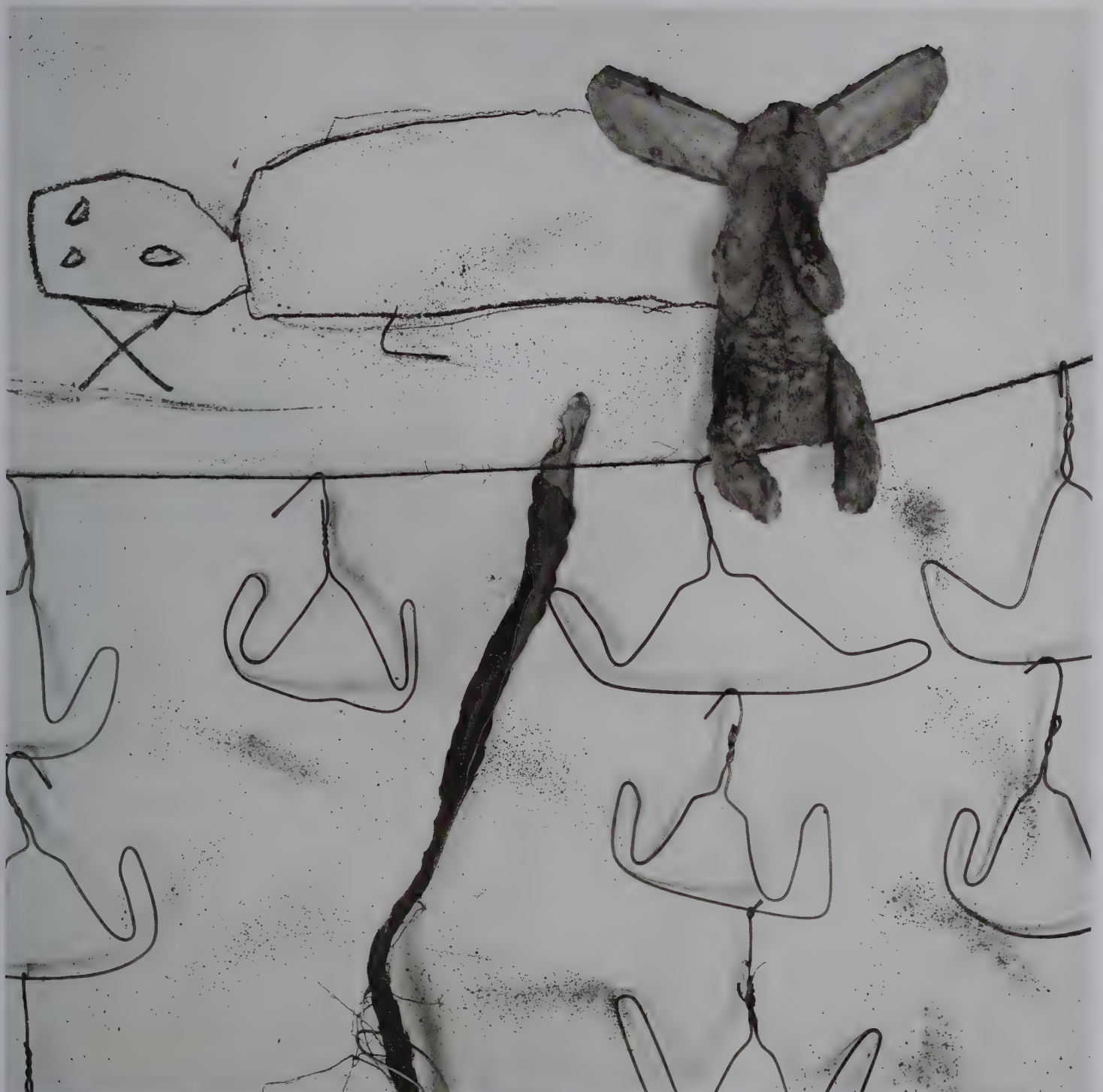


PLATE 26 *Washing Line*, from the Boarding House series, 2005
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 27 *Antithesis*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2005
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

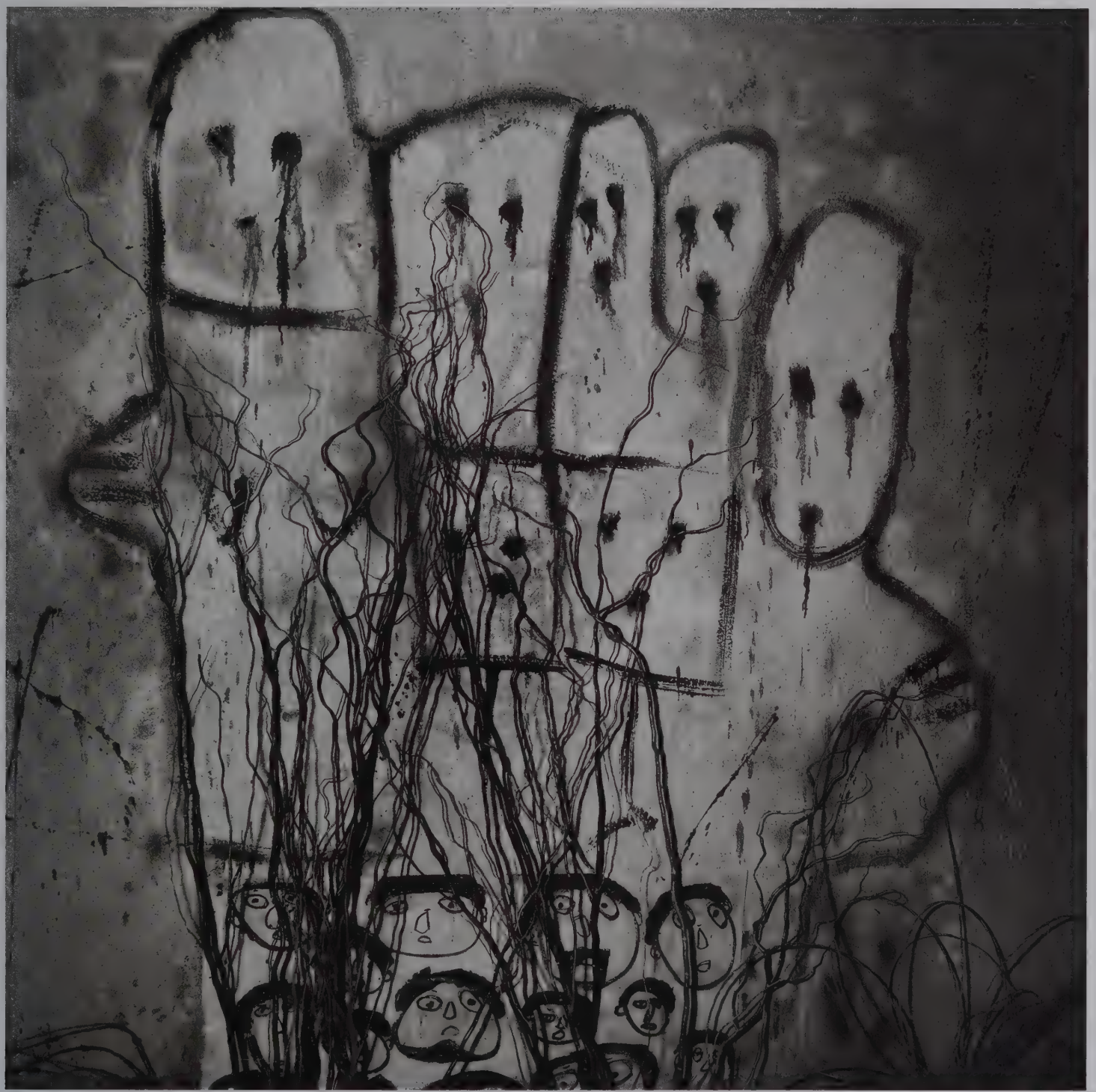


PLATE 28 *Funeral Rites*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2004
Silver gelatin print, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in.)

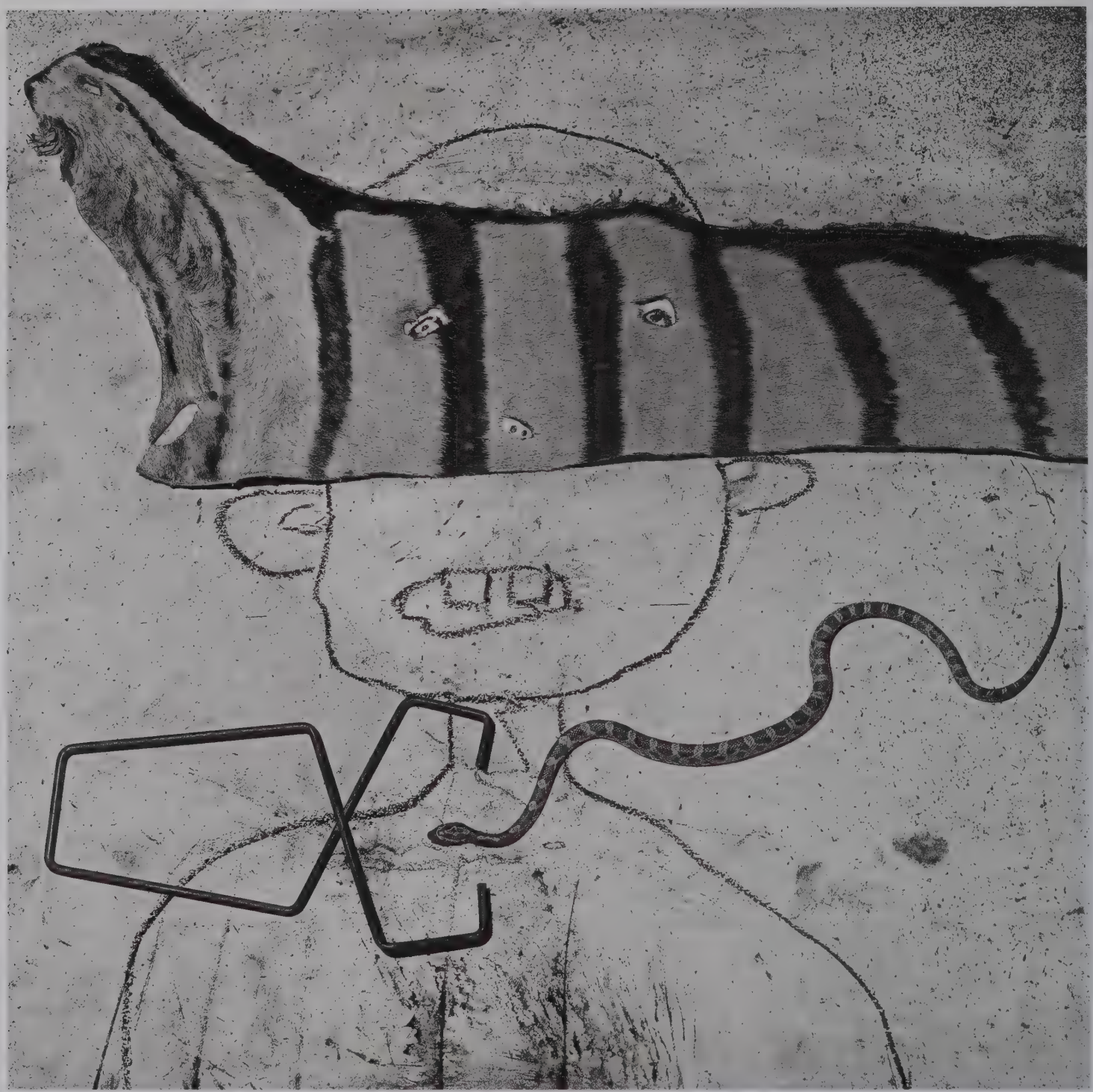


PLATE 29 *Wiggle*, from the Boarding House series, 2007
Silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

PLATE 30 *Ethereal*, from the Asylum series, 2011
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

I think drawing is a way of expressing what's inside the mind through the hand.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 31 *Mimicry*, from the Boarding House series, 2005
Silver gelatin print, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in.)

PLATE 32 *Predators*, from the Boarding House series, 2007
Silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

PLATE 33 *Captured*, from the Boarding House series, 2006
Silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

PLATE 34 *Culprit*, from the Boarding House series, 2006
Silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

PLATE 35 *Celebration*, from the Boarding House series, 2007
Silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

PLATE 36 *Five Hands*, from the Asylum series, 2006
Archival pigment print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

There's movement all the time: things and drawings are being put up and down; people are coming in and out; animals are flying [and] crawling around. . . . At a precise point, unity, life, intensity, and poetry come about, and it's my job to know that point.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 37 *Threat*, from the Asylum series, 2011
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 38 *Skins and Bones*, from the Boarding House series, 2007
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

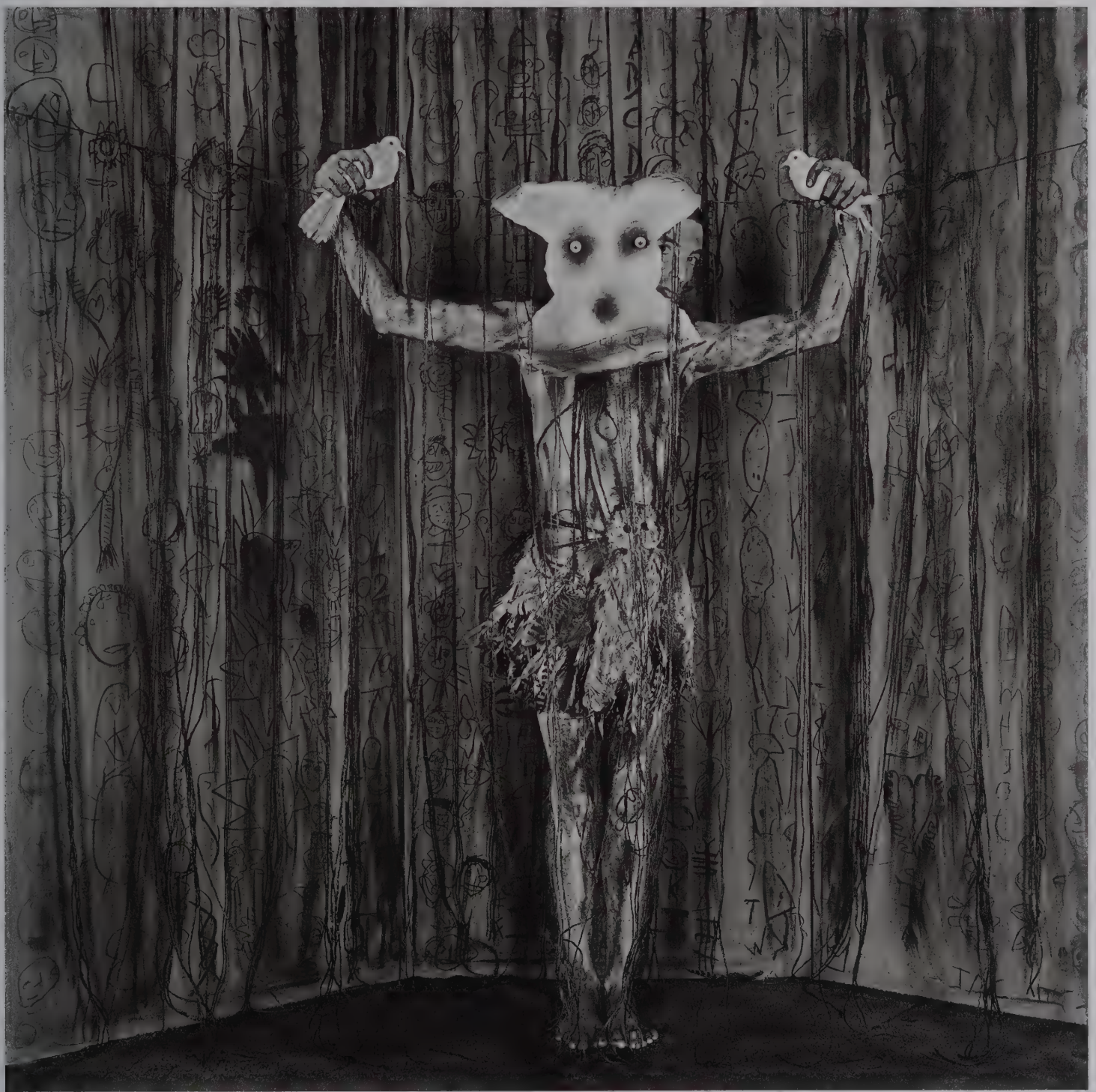


PLATE 39 *Alter Ego*, from the Asylum series, 2010
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

PLATE 40 *Serpent Lady*, from the Asylum series, 2009
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 41 *Ritual*, from the Asylum series, 2011
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 42 *Boarding House*, from the Boarding House series, 2008
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 43 *Jump*, from the Asylum series, 2009
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 44 *Rendezvous*, from the Asylum series, 2012
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

PLATE 45 *Guards*, from the Asylum series. 2011
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

When people look at a photograph, they want to believe in its authenticity, that they're looking at something special that can't be repeated. The artist's eye, the photographer's eye, has created a moment of truth by pushing the button on the camera.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 46 *Nine Birds*, from the Asylum series, 2009
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 47 *Banner*, from the Asylum series, 2009
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

PLATE 48 *Eyes in the Forest*, from the Asylum series, 2009
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

My camera doesn't draw. My camera is basically an instrument that reflects light from what's there already. I have to figure out how to take the lines—the drawings, scribbles, scratches, and scrawls—and create a coherency from them.

Roger Ballen

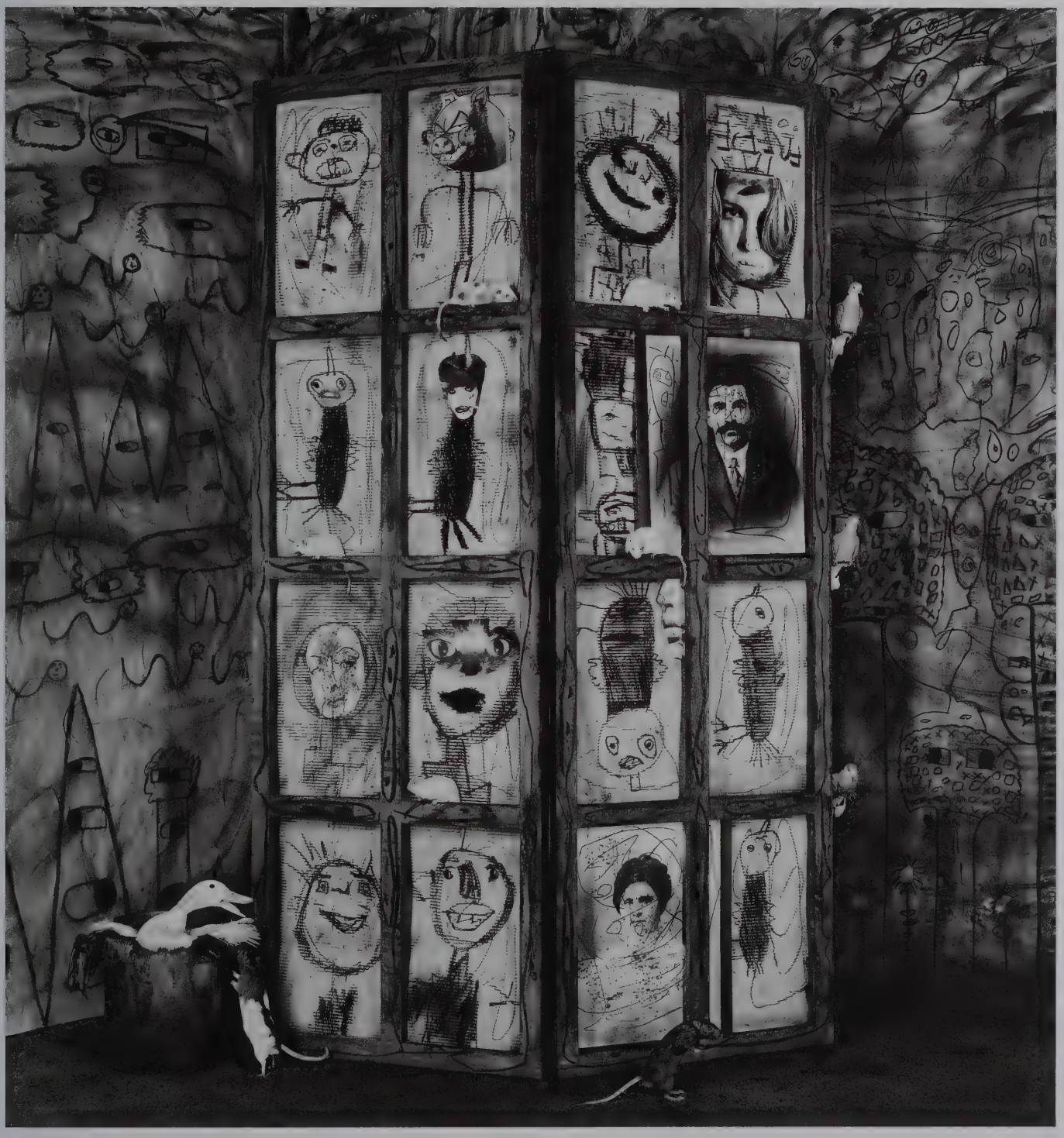


PLATE 49 *Onlookers*, from the Asylum series, 2010
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅛ x 35⅛ in.)

PLATE 50 *Repentance*, from the Asylum series, 2010
Archival pigment print, 90 x 90 cm (35⅜ x 35⅜ in.)

WATFORD LRC

A Roger Ballen photograph stands out as a Roger Ballen image. My fingerprint, my shadow, is quite identifiable. . . . My intention is to create imagery that challenges the mind.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 51 *Lion's Den*, from the Apparitions series. 2012
Archival pigment print. 60 x 45 cm (23⅝ x 17¾ in.)

PLATE 52 *Divided Self*, from the Apparitions series, 2007
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

PLATE 53 *Now and Then*, from the Apparitions series, 2007
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

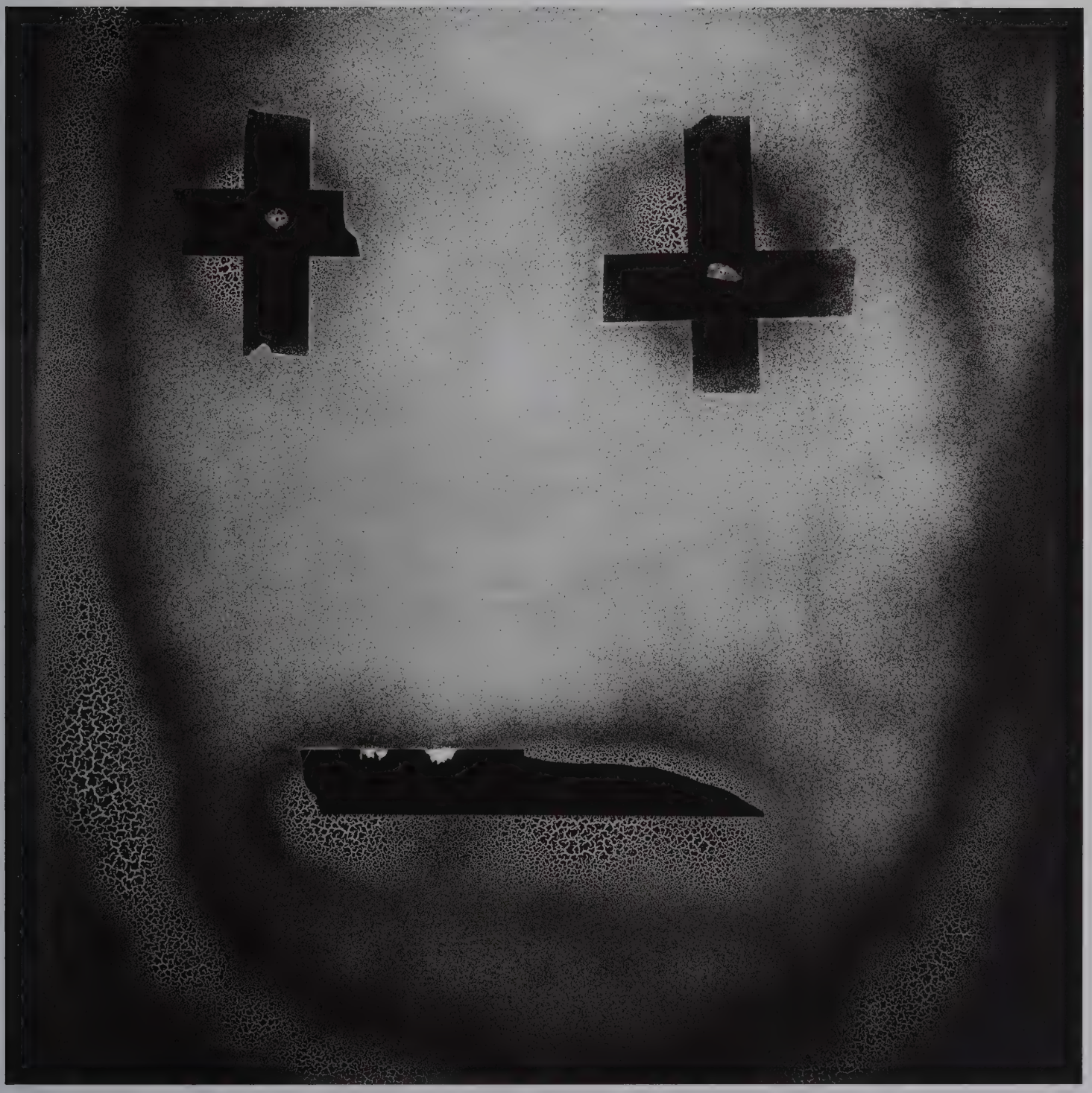
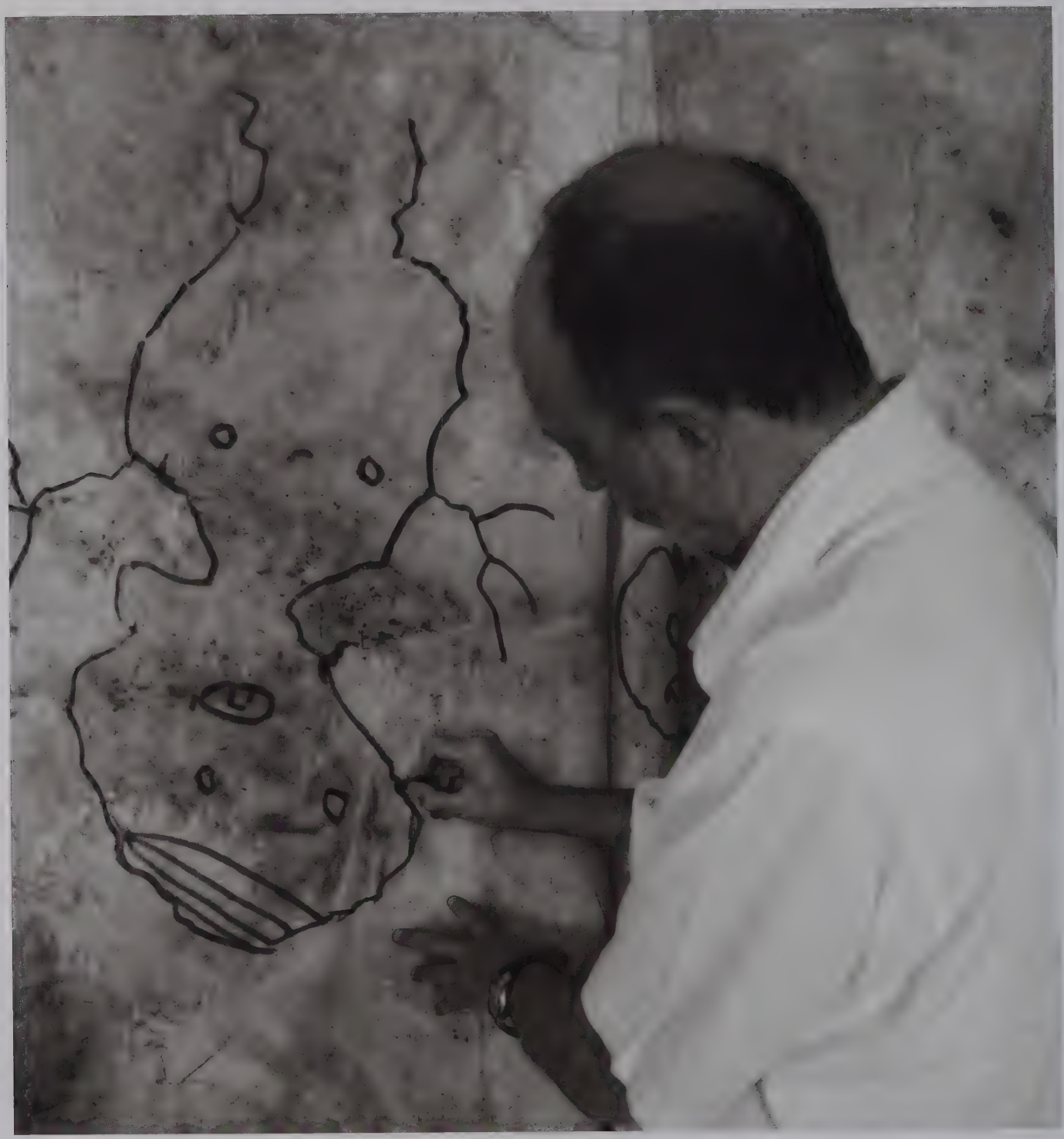


PLATE 54 *Injured*, from the Apparitions series. 2007
Archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

Photography is difficult because everything has to occur faster than you can blink. . . . In video you have more chances to come up with alternatives or additions, so it's a completely different process. Photography is more to the point; it's micro-time. Video is more like a human or lived time frame.

Roger Ballen

PLATE 55 *Spooky Eyes*, 2012
Archival pigment print, 35 x 28 cm (13¾ x 11 in.)



Roger Ballen, 2013

Photo by Marguerite Rossouw

Interview with Roger Ballen

Craig Allen Subler with Christine Mullen Kreamer

The interview took place September 23, 2012, in Ballen's studio, Johannesburg, South Africa.

PROCESS

CS: Roger, how do you begin a photograph?

RB: Well, I always say that a photograph began before I began making it, deep down in some part of my mind. It formed before my consciousness about it was formed. Since I'm part of all sorts of other consciousnesses that have existed throughout time, on a metaphoric level it's difficult to know when the photograph began. On a practical level, it usually begins with an object sitting there, or a person sitting there, with my connecting one thing to the next. I'm basically an organizer. I organize visual chaos into visual coherency.

CS: In our conversations over the last couple days, I have heard you say that you sometimes begin a work with a word.

RB: My bigger projects, like the Dorps, Platteland, and Shadow Chamber series, each began with a word. I try to define that word in concrete and abstract ways. But, when finally taking the photographs, I completely stay away from words, and my best photographs are difficult to assign words to. If you look at it logically, the pictures first are visual, and the greater the visual aspects of the picture, perhaps the greater the photograph. Second, a lot of my pictures have contradictory meanings, so it's almost impossible for me to start just with a word. I don't even think of words. I just deal with my own emotional level, which is wordless.

CS: In interviews you've been asked repeatedly why you exclusively use black and white, but I want to reverse the question: what is it about color that doesn't work for you?

RB: Well, the thing about color that doesn't work for me is the way people see photographs as a depiction of reality. Color photography is photographic color, but when somebody looks at a color photograph, the mind supposes something real, but the image is not real. A sort of cognitive dissonance takes place when a person looks at color. I like black-and-white photography because it doesn't start with those premises. It starts with the basic idea that you're looking at an abstract world. It's minimalistic. It fits my development as an artist, which is synonymous with my use of black and white. I'm focused on creating simple, clear, precise forms in my work, and I like that I can do that with black and white.

CS: When you were in school, abstract expression was nearing the end of its dominance in the art world. Drawing, and the notion of process, was then a primary concern. How did that shape your work?

RB: It's so hard to know exactly how different pieces in art history shaped my work because when I was younger, I took a lot of pictures of old men, which was inspired by my identification with Rembrandt. [Laughter.] In the early 1970s, I experimented with linking field painting to photography. I would look down on a subject from above and see a flat plane with everything in focus, and that was the beginning of quite an important characteristic of my work that has held up to the present: everything in the photograph should be absolutely, precisely in focus. I don't like things out of focus. The eye doesn't see that way. Some of my compositions have a similarity to the type of plane that the field painters used. In an abstract, unknowable way, I integrated the type of abstract drawings that went on in that field plane into my work (fig. 16).

CS: In the postmodern art world, concepts are too often positioned in front of craftsmanship. You talk about formal qualities, and your works are beautifully crafted, rich in tone and texture. What role does craftsmanship play in the production of the work?

RB: Yes, I'm formalistically obsessed. I see in a picture what I see in nature—everything has its place and is integrated. Like a tree or a human body, the image is put together for a greater whole. If you chop off something, you immediately destroy the organism. Form is crucial to what I do, and I believe that the form, in a way, creates the content. If you don't have the form, you don't get the content. If you get the maximum formal relationships in a precise, organic, metaphoric methodology, then you have a better chance of bringing out the content to its full degree. Of course, a picture doesn't stand alone by its form. You can have forms that relate but offer no meaning. Ultimately, a picture is judged by its meaning, and I think that's what a lot of people lose sight of.

CS: You're talking about form and about being precise, but recent pictures, such as ones in the Asylum series, always show something that you can't control. Can you talk about that?

RB: You're bringing up an important point, the issue of not being able to control a part of the photograph. That, to me, has always been crucial. A lot of people in the postmodern world forget about that control, which to me is the most important

FIG. 16. *Inverse, India*, 1973 (Plate 3)

concept in photography and separates it from other art forms. The crescendo, or high point, in art making is that thing that you can't control that then becomes integrated into the photograph. It's the crucial concept of what Henri Cartier-Bresson called the "decisive moment."[1]

Ultimately, whether you like a photograph or not, it has a history behind it. When people look at a photograph, they want to believe in its authenticity, that they're looking at something special that can't be repeated. The artist's eye, the photographer's eye, has created a moment of truth by pushing the button on the camera. The issue is not that the moment is separate from the rest of the photograph; it is the element that links what's happening to the rest of the image, and the photographer creates a higher meaning, a higher sensibility, in that instant. That's difficult to achieve for most people who are involved in photography as artists. It's an essential part of

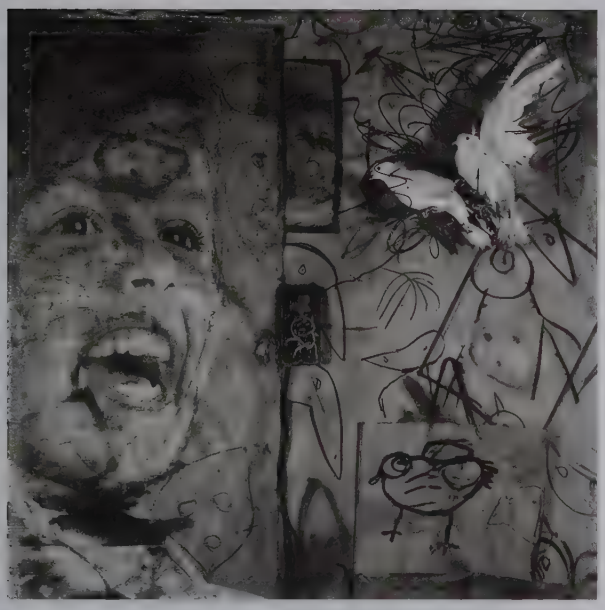


FIG. 17. *Banner,* from the Asylum series, 2009 (Plate 47)

basic photography that's learned on the street and in the traditional ways that people used to do photography (fig. 17).

CS: Your early works are pictures of exotic places—the landscapes, cityscapes, architecture. But in the Asylum series, we see a closing up of the pictorial space. Can you talk about this?

RB: In the last thirty or forty years, I have gradually moved my work away from "the world as the stage." As time has gone on, the places I photograph get smaller and smaller to the point where I would say my pictures are about a point on the wall. I keep going back to the same point, to a nail on the wall, and each time I get there, I try to drive the nail further into the wall. The process that I've been involved in for the last forty years or so is starting out any place on the planet, where anything is possible, and going back to the same place and finding different and deeper aspects of reality.

CS: Is this just a retreat—internally and externally—to the notion of studio photography?

RB: Yes, I think so. The room becomes a place of the mind. If you're going back to the same room all the time, you're actually able to find a relationship between what's inside and what's outside. You're perhaps more in control of that. I guess, as time has gone on, the pictures have become much more psychologically orientated, much more about my own psyche and less about the psyches of others. By going back to smaller and smaller places, smaller and smaller rooms, smaller and smaller more confined spaces, I'm able to squeeze out what's inside and put it on film.

CS: In a sense you've actually retreated from the darkroom production of your work to printing digitally. You've withdrawn even further, it seems to me. Do you see it that way?

RB: I make my photographs with the same Rolleiflex two-and-a-quarter by two-and-a-quarter camera I've used for the last thirty years. I'm still using film. The only difference is that when I make prints, I don't make as many silver prints. But I still take the pictures with film, which is then scanned. In a core way the concept of the image hasn't changed.

CS: Let's talk about scale. The images in the early photographs were small, eight by ten. But in the more recent works, the scale has increased dramatically. Can you talk about that?

RB: The scale has changed gradually over the years, and I'm certainly the last one to believe that bigger is better. You know, we've seen a trend over the last ten to fifteen years, especially in color photography, and it tricks the mind. The mind has been trained to think that if something's bigger, it may be better. I've done bigger pictures primarily for one reason: to be able to see the detail and density. On the other hand, I have noticed at some of my retrospectives that the smaller pictures, the eight by tens, had more impact on the viewer than some of the bigger ones. This might be because people are used to looking at big pictures from a distance, so when they have to go close to bring the pictures into their line of sight, they feel more intimacy and are more effected than when viewing bigger photographs.

DRAWING

CS: You've been photographing posters, graffiti, and drawings on walls for many years now. Can you talk about that aspect of it?

RB: You're right about that. I started photographing graffiti walls in the late 1960s and have continued doing that to the present. The wall is like the artist's canvas, the back of the canvas, the picture, the beginning of the painting. It's the stage before the actors walk on. So, in a way, it's had an auxiliary meaning to the photograph. In some cases, it's a bit more than auxiliary—it's been dominant. But it's also been the background and the setup for the rest of the picture. I can't describe it any better than that. It's the stage before the actors walk on.

Most important, the concept of using drawing in my photographs came about as a result of my interacting with people who drew on their walls in their homes. I was immediately fascinated by what I observed and quickly began to place my subjects in front of the drawings. You can find many images from my work at this time using that aesthetic approach (fig. 18). Beginning in 2003 and continuing to the present, I actively began to interact with my subjects in this regard. The drawings in my images are sometimes only mine; at other times, they are by the people I work with, and frequently both. So my evolution as a photographer who uses drawing came from street photography—from "real life."

FIG. 18. *Under the Moon*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2000, silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

CS: I want to talk about drawing now, as part of the process, and I guess the first question I want to ask is: What do you understand drawing to be?

RB: Well, I think drawing is a way of expressing what's inside the mind through the hand. That definition doesn't take into account all sorts of other things, however. Drawing sometimes can happen just by placing different objects or shapes in a strange fashion without any intention whatsoever. A drawing can be scribbles, it can be scratches, and it can be scrawls (fig. 19). Drawing can be a conscious activity or an unconscious one; it can be integrating scribbles, scratches, and scrawls on something and linking them with something else. It's complex.

But I think we should perhaps move on to another issue, because my camera doesn't draw. My camera is basically an instrument that reflects light from what's there already. I have to figure out how to take the lines—the drawings, scribbles, scratches, and scrawls—and create a coherency from them. The drawings are usually in the background of my work, so the most challenging part of my job, in some ways, is integrating the form and content of the drawing with the other aspects of the photographs, such as the animals, objects, and people. I think that is what makes my style unique in photography. A Roger Ballen photograph stands out as a Roger Ballen image. My fingerprint, my shadow, is quite identifiable.

CS: In a world where we are constantly being bombarded with videos and photographic images, the drawings you add to the photographs create a tension between the mechanical photographic process and the hand. Is that your intention?

RB: I think my intention is to create imagery that challenges the mind, that brings up imagery that people have either lost, forgotten about, or are scared of. I see my imagery as revealers, like reflections in the water that are somehow connected to shadows of the self. The pictures I draw for the photographs I take aren't made for the viewer. They're predominantly ways of connecting one part of me to another.

CS: One other process I'd like you to elaborate on is the process of drawing on glass, which you are using in your series called Apparitions. Could you please explain that a little bit?

FIG. 19. *Hand Drawn Hearts*, from the Outland series, 2000, silver gelatin print, 50 x 50 cm (19 11/16 x 19 11/16 in.)

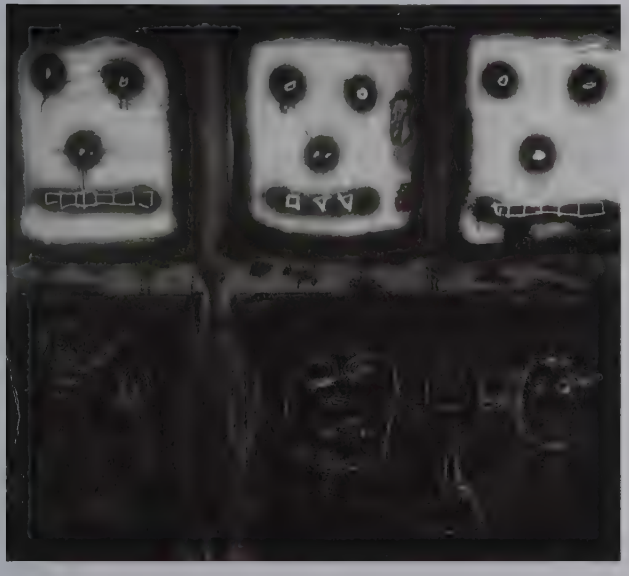


FIG. 20. *White Faces*, from the Apparitions series, 2005, archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in.)

RB: Some of the latest pictures I have taken are those with black backgrounds with the drawings that are usually partly illuminated in white. The pictures are taken on glass. I've been working on the series for about seven or eight years and have expanded the technique over time. The series has a lot of different subgroups, which all strongly contrast deep blacks with illuminating white (fig. 20).

CS: The photographs made through this process have become more abstract, and the drawing is the subject matter of the photograph. Can you talk about that?

RB: The series Apparitions could be seen as the culmination of my work connecting photography to drawing. It is hard to conceive how I can go any further connecting these two media.

CS: That begs the question: does the series on glass deny the process of drawing because it's a photograph?

RB: No, it doesn't at all because you only take the photograph when the drawing becomes coherent with other parts of the image. So the photograph is the last part. But—and this is the important point—the reason I'm able to make the drawings on glass, and most people can't, has to do with the process I've developed, which is ultimately linked to my understanding, skill, and development as a photographer in black and white. The pictures are made for the camera, not for a painting, drawing, or video. I developed this technique parallel to my evolution as a photographer working in black and white. Someone else, who probably hasn't had that experience, wouldn't be able to get there because they lack the understanding of photography. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that the meaning one finds in these images is linked in nearly all ways to the imagery you might find in my drawings from the Shadow Chamber, Boarding House, and Asylum projects.

CS: So is it a drawing or a photograph in the end?

RB: It's both. It's a photograph, but it's made up of drawings; it's all intertwined. It's a Roger Ballen photograph.

CS: Roger, do you see any connection between your training as a geologist and your work as a photographer?

FIG. 21. *Flame*, from the Boarding House series, 2007, silver gelatin print, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in.)

RB: Photography and geology can each be an art and a science. The science is based on chemistry. On the other hand, looking at the earth brings forth a host of metaphors—the layers, the intrusions, the shapes, the forms, and the evolution of the planet. Nature has been a great inspiration for me, and geology certainly brings one into contact with nature. On the other side, there's grit, a sense of earthiness, in a lot of my pictures.

CS: I think that makes sense, but to be more specific here, part of your training and job as a geologist involved reading diagrams, charts, and drawings and getting information from them. Has that awareness, from reading those types of documents, influenced you in terms of your interest in line?

RB: I'm not certain about that. I think other things have had more influence. Graffiti, for example. I see lines and shapes and forms on walls and other places, and I try to make figures and sense out of that. I've been doing that since I was a child looking at the shapes of clouds. When I interact with walls, I often search for disparate lines that I can link.

CS: Looking at your work, particularly the new images—and I don't know if you see it this way—is like undertaking archaeology, in that the viewer has a sense of sifting through layers. The graffiti and each of the objects have their own history within the photographic image. Do you perceive this relationship to archaeology (fig. 21)?

RB: It's intuitive in my process to try to seek out different layered, complex meanings in what I do. The challenge in doing the work is defining relationships that I was unaware of and creating coherent wholes out of disparate things. You don't hear much about meaning in art these days. It's too wound up in the verbal; but the real key for me is that the meaning somehow rings bells, not on level one inside, but on level ten or eleven. But you're right—I think earlier you asked a question about geology. Whether it's geology or archaeology, if you're looking at rocks or on an archaeological dig, you're trying to create meaning from unrelated aspects and deciphering life from them.

CS: When we were talking the other day, you said something I thought was interesting about the other "Roger world," the geology "Roger world." You were talking about going into the mines and going down, down, down into the layers of earth. That's a metaphor for your work.

RB: You're right about that. Going into the mine, down the shaft, is like going down into one's deep subconscious. You get there, and now you're on level ten, whether in the mine or the mind. Things are not going to manifest themselves down there, so I have to go from level ten back up again and make visible what I have found, bring them to the surface. That's the hard part.

CS: The hand and images of hands play prominent roles, physically as well as symbolically, in many of the photographs. Can you expand on this motif and how and why you use it (fig. 22)?

RB: In some ways, it's mysterious to me. There's a nebulous link between what's up in the mind and what's at the tip of the finger. I don't even begin to understand how messages get transferred. The hand is like the angel or the wing or the bird of the mind.

Since beginning the Boarding House series, around the year 2000 or so, many of my images have featured the hand.

The hand by itself is a work of sculpture with an identity of its own—but in some of the pictures there is a relationship between the physical photograph and those who made the drawings. That's the tricky part, because you can't just look at a hand and think, "Did that hand draw those pictures?" That's the wrong way of looking at the work. The correct way is to think of how the form of the hand comes through in the form of the drawing. So the drawing becomes part of the hand, and the hand becomes part of the drawing in the work. They become unified and transformed into an integrated, organic whole, each reflecting or playing on the other. When this unity occurs, successful images are created.

CS: I assume that the hard part of taking the photographs for some of the more recent series was preserving the intimacy while capturing the precise moments to take the shots.

RB: In the places where I work there is a lot of activity. I usually have people and animals around me. There's movement all the time: things and drawings are being put up and down; people are coming in and out; animals are flying around; other animals are crawling around. At a certain point, and it may just be a small point, it's totally up to me to recognize the moment to take the picture, because nobody else will see it. It's my job to perceive the flux as it moves from one place to the next. At a precise point, unity, life, intensity, and poetry come about, and it's my job to know that point. To find it, I have to rely on various parts of my mind. We commonly divide the mind into the conscious and the subconscious, but that's the easy way of talking about it. In reality an internal force, the being that is outside the control of consciousness, works on so many different levels that ultimately it is the decider. There's a time when "the decider," if you want to call it by a name, goes from red light to yellow light and then suddenly says "Green, go, go!" And then I walk to the camera and pick it up and start to get it ready. But I don't act until the decider says "Green." But what tells the decider to say "Go"? I'm not sure about that.

FIG. 22. *Five Hands*, from the Asylum series, 2006 (Plate 36)

CS: So, Roger, does theater play a role in your work?

RB: I don't think theater plays a role in the work. When I start out with the picture, I don't have a beginning and an end. People always ask me about the "stage." They say, "Well are the pictures staged?" This notion—staged photography—is from contemporary art. The answer to something staged is that you can repeat it again and again precisely. But for me, the picture has to feel like it could never be done again. It has to be the moment the viewer sees as being authentic, unrepeatable. The more that people believe in the authenticity of the moment, usually the more impact, all things being equal, the picture has.

CS: I want to get back to the process of taking photographs. You say your job is to find that point. Are you taking tons of shots, and then sifting through to find that great image?

RB: You know, I never leave a scene and say I got the picture. That's the one thing I like about black-and-white film photography: you can't ever be sure until you view the developed film. It's like taking aim at an archery target with the bull's eye in the center and different colors around it. Sometimes I feel like I've hit around the center, but I never say I got it in the center. I actually don't really know if I got the picture. I tend to shoot around the picture as best as I can, around movement or whatever else is happening, until I feel I've had enough. It's like food; you eat, and at a certain point you're not hungry anymore. It's the same with the work, sometimes for obvious

reasons. Let's say a rat or a mouse runs and stops—bam, bam, bam, bam—and then he runs into a hole, and that's the end of the picture. [Laughter.] Sometimes somebody's fallen asleep on the floor, which was what made the picture, and I took the shot—bam, bam, bam—then there's nothing more I can do there. It's finished. All sorts of things happen (figs. 23 and 24). Someone's sleeping and then a dog comes over and licks the person, and the person gets up, and then a cat jumps on top of the dog. So, it depends on the picture. In digital, you have sometimes more than a thousand shots in a chip. Because I use film, the process has preciousness. In 120 millimeter photography, I can't be going bam, bam, bam, bam. I've got to stop and change the roll again. I have to make the best of my shots.

CS: Is the camera always on a tripod, or is it handheld?

RB: Up to the beginning of the Asylum series, I always held my camera. During the Asylum series, I shifted to a tripod for two reasons. First, the sets were more complex and require more elaborate lighting systems. Second, I hate to say it, but I was getting such a sore neck over the years. [Laughter.] So, I started to get in the habit of using a tripod, and I'm happy with it. On the other side, the square format is difficult. First, the image is flipped over, so if you move left, you're moving on the other side. It's not like the 35 millimeter, where it's exactly what you see; with the square format, it's flipped over. It's also difficult to get the right proportions so that the picture is not distorted or out of line. That's hard to do with a square-format camera, especially if it's around your neck; when you move, you're moving in the opposite direction of what you see through the camera's viewfinder. I'm so surprised that I have been able to create thousands and thousands of successful pictures that way. My hit ratio of good shots to bad ones over the past few years has been much greater. So I must be doing something right!

CS: It's interesting. Part of the square format is the camera you're using, but the two worst formats to work with are a square and a circle, which brings up the issue: do you crop?

RB: No, I rarely crop. The reason I like square is that it's the perfect form. It goes back to my philosophy that everything in the picture has to have an equal meaning. Square is the perfect format for me because of my obsession with formality.

FIG. 23. *Granny, Son and Pets*, from the Outland series, 1998, silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

CS: The other thing that I find so interesting about black-and-white photography is that when you read about the early filmmakers, particularly from the 1930s and 1940s, they were acutely aware of how certain colors and textures would photograph in black and white for dramatic reasons. Because you are seeing the image in color, do you know what you are getting tonally in the black-and-white image before you shoot?

RB: Yes, implicitly. Implicitly, Mr. Decider back here in my mind understands when the tonal aspects are working in conjunction with the other parts of the picture. I mean, that's such a crucial aspect, and you can't believe how many people—and I'm not talking about amateurs, I'm talking about professional people who spent years studying photography—have no understanding of what I'm talking about. Painters understand it.

As a painter, Craig, you know that the eye goes to the light. In photography some have little understanding of that, because it's so content driven. Many photographers have no understanding of tone and balance, which ultimately relate back to the meaning of the picture. This is a real problem in photography these days.

FIG. 24. *Transformation*, from the Asylum series, 2004, archival pigment print, 60 x 60 cm (23⅝ x 23⅝ in.)

COLLABORATION

CS: I now want to ask about issues of collaboration. At the time you take a picture of your model, there is an unspoken complicity. Collaboration is implied. Can you talk about that, and define the idea of collaboration as you use it (fig. 25)?

RB: I think my work has evolved in many ways. Up to the Outland pictures, which I began in the mid-1990s, I was present as a photographer, documenting the subject in a traditional way. But around that time, a sense of theater evolved, and it was hard to determine whether I was the director or they, the subjects, were the director, or whether it was just spontaneous collaboration between me and other people. People may do certain things that they feel come naturally to them, or they may want to please me. The best photographs usually happen when the subject forgets about the camera. A lot of the people that I have photographed over the years probably were never photographed before; they were living on the periphery of society without an understanding of what a camera does or how it transforms people. So, they don't feel self-conscious in front of the camera. It's usually in that type of relationship that you find the most interesting things happening.

But you have to understand that my pictures are usually about a lot of other aspects in the image other than what the subject does. The subject is doing things in relationship to other things, and I have to find, as we discussed earlier, that crucial point, whether it's a quick movement of his head or the blink of his eye, or the scratching of his shoulder, or the picking up of something on the floor. An eye blink is a movement, and sometimes a critical movement. It may be just the way the eye blinks that creates that crucial point. So, it's not just a simple collaboration between me and the subject. I'm not looking at ten, fifteen, twenty different things around me. Mr. Decider might be aware of ten thousand different things—literally, I'm not joking. The pictures are made up of thousands of points and the little decisions that get you to that point. To get there you have to push your way through and throw out all sorts of things—add things, take away things. It's almost infinite—the process, the choices. That's the hard part about this job as a photographer. What makes photography so difficult? There are so many things to shoot, that's what makes it so difficult. How do you break infinity into a few shapes, forms, lines, and drawings that work, that stay inside the viewer for his or her lifetime?

CS: When we were talking the other day, you talked about invisibility, and you said that, to your subjects, the lens is invisible to them. Are you invisible to them, as well?

RB: Well, the first thing I decided, and it gets back to college days in Berkeley when I was reading R. D. Laing,[2] is that I never know what goes on in the other's mind. [Laughter.] So please bear with me on that.

CS: Ok, I can buy that. Is your subject a performer to you?

RB: Yeah, I mean, a rat is a subject as much as a person is a subject, or a dog. The dog's walking this way, and suddenly you scream, "Spot, turn around, turn around!" and Spot looks up, boom, got it. And that's all I can do with Spot. Everybody, everything, is a performer, and at the end of the day, drawings like those in my photographs are also performers. They're saying something. If they didn't say something and cannot be made to come alive they shouldn't be photographed.

FIG. 25. *Les Hammering into Wall*, from the Outland series, 2000, silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

CS: A real surprise as I was going through the photographs was seeing all the animal photographs. I did not expect the quantity that I found. What's the challenge of working with animals?

RB: The animal is truth, a reflection of purity. I'm intrigued by animal psychology. Put metaphorically, the animal's the id. If you want to try to understand deeper parts of human behavior, sometimes a good place to start is with the animal. Each species of animal brings with it its own mythology, and when you bring that mythology into a photograph, it offers unlimited possibilities for creating deeper meanings relevant to the human condition.

CS: When does the collaboration stop and the work become wholly yours?

RB: It's always wholly mine. It's a matter of the way I organize reality. My images are essentially transformed photographic realities created by the interaction between my mind and the place.

CS: In works such as those in the Asylum series [such as pl. 40], there seems to be a conscious move on your part to represent the sitter in fragment. Can you talk about that?

RB: Sure. The pictures from Boarding House and the more recent works in Asylum rarely show the face of a live model. When I look back, I wonder, how did this evolve? Why did it evolve? I've stated on many occasions that small things make big things. When human beings look at a photograph, the first thing they'll look at is a face. The face has become an all-encompassing aspect for trying to understand the general meaning of the work. Once the face disappears, the other elements in the photograph have a chance. My pictures have a lot of other things in them that I want to bring to the forefront. As long as a face was in the image, this was not possible. Basically I wanted to move on. That's my job, to keep finding things that expand my consciousness. There's no point in taking pictures of the same old stuff. For what? Life passes by; time is short.

CS: Let's talk about the viewer, the fourth wall, to use a theater term. What do you want the viewer to discover in your photographs?

RB: Well, I want viewers to discover themselves, their interiors. The problem we have faced as human beings over the last couple thousand years is our inability to come to grips with our identity in any real way. Most of us live in a continual state of repression. This repression is the fuel for war, ecological destruction, and all sorts of other negative, aggressive behavior patterns that dominate the planet.

If I go to a museum, I like walking around, but I stop when something grabs me. You know, it's like a hand coming out of a painting, grabbing me by the neck. That's what I want to happen to me when I look at art. I want to be jolted. I want my pictures to jolt people, because if people get that little jolt, I know it's gotten inside them. No matter how hard they resist that, I know it's there. Maybe that's the first step in coming to grips with one's own identity. It's an infinite process, a lifetime process, but I am convinced that art can help people get to know themselves better.

NARRATIVE, SERIES, AND VIDEO

CS: What role does narrative play in the work (fig. 26)?

RB: That's a good point; it's a complex issue in this type of work. When I refer to a narrative, I think that the picture has complete logic to it; it implicitly makes sense. It doesn't mean there can't be ambiguity, but logic runs throughout every part of what's there. It makes sense to the mind implicitly. Therefore, I think most good photographs have to have a narrative, a sense of beginning and end, a completion to what's there. And it must be visual.

CS: So, are you talking about the narrative as just one moment in a photograph?

RB: I am referring to an image that is visually logical, self-contained, like any living being.

CS: Okay, but you also work in series of images, such as Dorps, Platteland, and Asylum.

RB: The images in a series have to work together, and the pictures have to overlap. To go back a step, there always will be that link that connects one image to another. The most important part of the narrative, if you want to call it that, or in the book or series, is that the pictures are intrinsically strong in themselves. A variety of shots create a coherent balance, a mise-en-scène.

CS: How do you see the tension in your work between the grotesque and the formal beauty of the photograph (fig. 27)?

RB: I think that's an important tension, and it runs through all my work. Partly what makes my work unique in its way, and also complex, is that you find these pervasive opposing meanings. You're absolutely correct when you say that I've been able to combine aspects of beauty with the grotesque and still create a meaningful photograph. That's an interesting aspect of the work.

CS: I want to talk about your video work. Your series of photographs from Platteland are about outsiders, the people

FIG. 26. *Bitten*, from the Shadow Chamber series, 2004, silver gelatin print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

on the fringes of society. The rap group Die Antwoord, their music and persona, strike me as being from that world. In your recent video with them, *I Fink U Freeky*, the lyrics and music seem to fit comfortably in your work. Do you see connections in your earlier work with your video collaboration with them (fig. 28)?

RB: Yes, I think Die Antwoord identifies with both sides of my work. A similar visual archetypal person pervades *I Fink U Freeky* and other videos they've made and my Platteland and Outland series. Furthermore, the drawings on their clothes, the graffiti-like drawings in the background on the stage sets, as well as some of the objects in the video come right out of my photographs. Through music, dance, and video, Die Antwoord integrated and transformed the abstract elements in my photographs—the drawings—and some of the mundane aspects, such as the type of subjects I have worked with over the years.

CS: How did *I Fink U Freeky* come about?

RB: Ninja and Yo-landi of Die Antwoord and I had been talking for nearly eight years about making a video together. I was

interested, but I didn't think too much about it because I was a still photographer and my focus has been that. They lived in Cape Town, and although we usually spoke when they were up in Johannesburg, they were busy with their music. So it was hard to find a theme for our collaboration. This went on for a long time, and then they made their first video, and a lot of the imagery in it came from my photographs. The video went viral. It got eight million hits in a few weeks. People said, "Geez, that looks like your photographs and your paintings and your drawings." I couldn't believe the impact; I mean I didn't even know what YouTube was at the time! I had never looked at one thing!

FIG. 27. *Alight*, from the Boarding House series, 2007, archival pigment print, 80 x 80 cm (31½ x 31½ in.)

CS: Making a film or video is a linear and scripted process. The *I Fink U Freeky* video with Die Antwoord has a defined narrative, albeit it a small one. Before, you were talking about making photographs in which dogs, birds, and models are walking around arbitrarily and you must choose the moment to define the image in an instant. Can you talk about the difference between these two different approaches in your work?

RB: That's an interesting and a very good point. I always feel that photography is difficult because everything has to occur faster than you can blink. You've got to get everything within a short time in a small space, and everything has to be there—the whole narrative, the whole meaning. In video you have more chances to come up with alternatives or additions, so it's a completely different process. Photography is more to the point; it's micro-time. Video is more like a human or lived time frame. I would say that where photography and film do come together, and where they should come together, and where they did come together in the *I Fink U Freeky* video, is in the imagery. If it is strong, then it's more likely to have a powerful effect on people. Nevertheless, if the narrative is weak, the video will lack impact. In *I Fink U Freeky* the music is the thread that helps link the images. You don't get that in still photography, which is a much more cerebral and reflective process. The music just grabs you instinctually, and that's why music is so powerful, like sport or war. It grips us and carries us along. It elicits all sorts of instinctual responses. A still photograph can do that, too, can generate an intuitive response, but it generally takes a more refined or knowledgeable viewer to enter the world that photographs create. That's why music is all-pervasive. Everywhere you go in the world, whether an airport or a theater or wherever, you can't escape it. I find that to be quite distracting.

CS: Finally, Roger, the inevitable question: What photographers have inspired you the most?

RB: Well, I've been inspired by photographers who worked in different periods. When I was young, photographers had by far the most impact on me. I came from a strong photographic background. My mother worked at Magnum and started one of the first photo galleries in the United States. She was the first person to sell works by André Kertész. He came to my house many times. As a boy I was immersed in this and inspired by all these people in some way or another. I would say that Henri Cartier-Bresson taught me about the decisive moment. Paul Strand taught me about the perfect composition. Kertész taught me about enigma. Elliot Erwitt taught me about humor in a photograph. All those people motivated me as a young man, but as time has gone on, I've been less and less inspired by photography. First of all, only a few black-and-white photographers are left. There's hardly anybody in my

FIG. 28. *Die Antwoord*, 2008, archival pigment print, 40 x 40 cm (15¾ x 15¾ in.)

field anymore! I'm not moved by color photography, generally speaking. I would say that for the last twenty years, there's not been much in photography that has served as inspiration in my work. I guess the last photographer who inspired me in some real, direct way was Walker Evans, when I did the book on Dorps in the 1980s.[3]

I'm really enthusiastic about the body of work selected for this book by the National Museum of African Art, which discusses my development from the late 1960s, when I photographed graffiti, to the present day, when drawings dominate the imagery. This volume is the first to go into any depth regarding the importance of drawing and line in my photographs, which is a central aspect of my career but has been largely ignored.

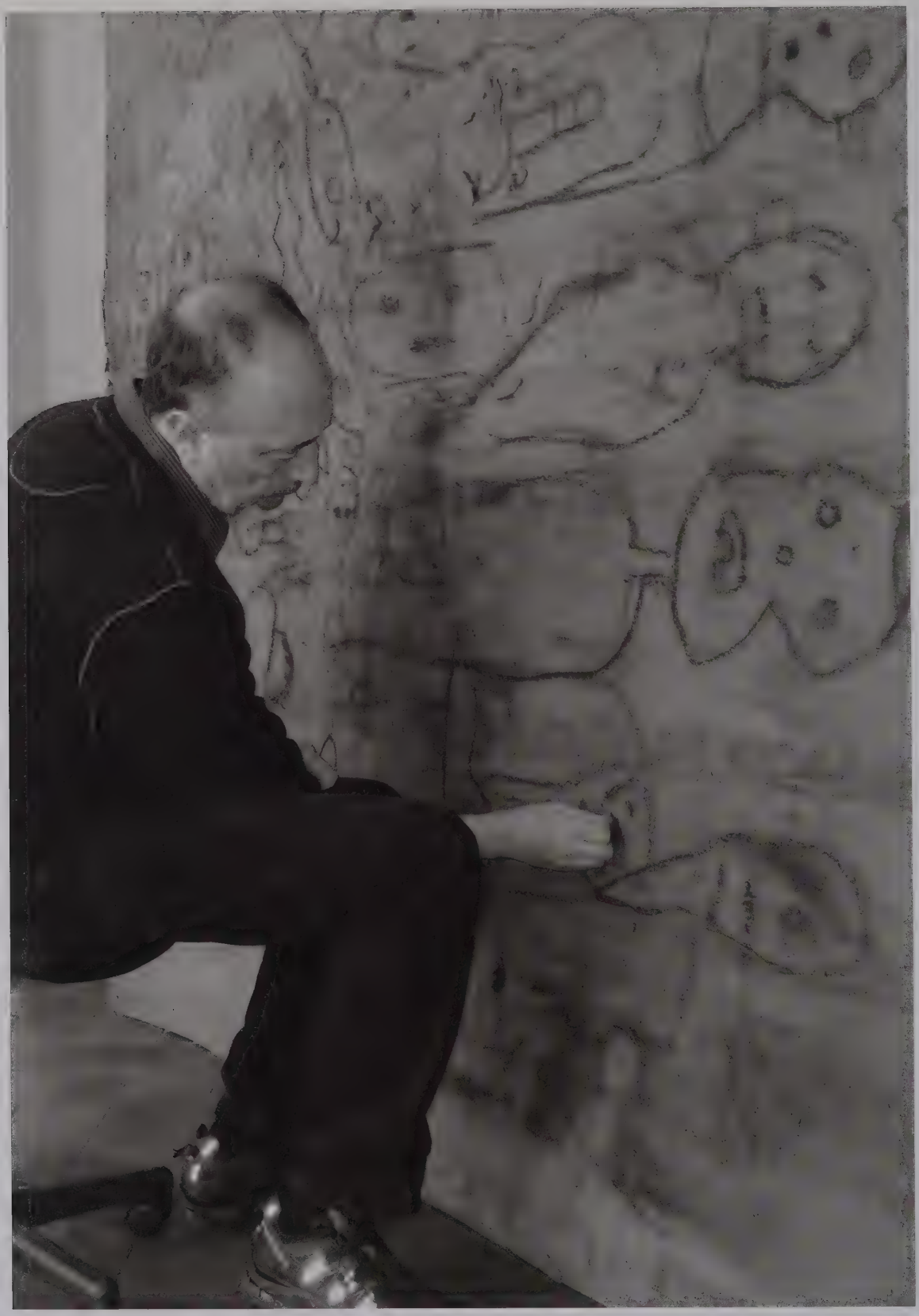
CS: But some of your more recent works are as abstract as those you produced at the beginning of your career, which I find interesting. Also, I've noticed that a number of artists working in South Africa—prominent artists, such as you, Marlene Dumas, and William Kentridge—focus on drawing. Is that just something in the air in South Africa?

RB: I don't know. I think drawing's an important part of art. South Africa is a small country, so the few artists here doing interesting work stand out. You find them easily, whereas in the United States, with so many divergent people, it's probably hard to get a handle on art trends. It's hard to understand whether it's the culture or a coincidence. I really don't know.

I think what is probably most defined in this country is the dichotomy between the First and Third Worlds. I'm from the First World; I live like a First World person. But in just five steps, I'm in the Third World. I like to bring that concept back to mind because the unconscious, the id, is like the Third World. The First World is like the ego. For me, this culture is like my relationship between my ego and my id. I'm constantly going back and forth between them, and so the environment is similar to my state of mind. To return to a point we discussed earlier: Some of these drawings weren't even mine, initially. They were somebody else's. The people I work with draw like me.

NOTES

1. Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment: Photography by Henri Cartier-Bresson* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952).
2. Ballen refers to the Scottish psychiatrist Ronald David Laing (1927–1989), whose controversial antibiological stance on mental illness, particularly psychosis, influenced existential philosophy in the 1960s and 1970s. Ballen's *Divided Self,* 2007 (pl. 52), may have referenced Laing's book *The Divided Self: A Study of Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock, 1960), which was followed the next year (same publisher) by *The Self and Others: Further Studies in Sanity and Madness* and many subsequent publications.
3. See Roger Ballen, *Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa* (Cape Town: Clifton, 1986).



Roger Ballen, 2012

Photo by Craig Allen Subler

About the Artist

Roger Ballen was born in New York City in 1950. He has lived and worked in South Africa for more than thirty years—first as a geologist and later as a full-time photographer. He has been shooting black-and-white film for nearly a half-century, and he believes he is part of the last generation to grow up with this medium. The photographer's body of work, often distinguished by complex interior arrangements of people, animals, and furnishings, reveals his longstanding engagement with line and drawing.

PUBLICATIONS

Books

Asylum. Thames and Hudson, London, forthcoming (2014)

Roger Ballen / Die Antwoord, I Fink U Freeky. Prestel, Munich, 2013

Roger Ballen, Photo Poche. Introduction by Dominique Eddé. France, 2012

Roger Ballen: Animal Abstraction. Introduction by Wim Pijbes. Reflex Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2011

Boarding House. Introduction by David Travis. Phaidon, London, 2009

Brutal, Tender, Human, Animal: Roger Ballen Photography. Canberra, National Library of Australia, 2008; Perth, Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2007

Shadow Chamber. Introduction by Robert A. Sobieszek. Phaidon, London, 2005

Outland. Introduction by Peter Weiermair. Phaidon, London, 2001

Cette Afrique-là: Photographies de Roger Ballen. Introduction by Lionel Murcott. Photo Poche series, Editions Nathan, Paris, 1997

Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa. Introduction by Roger Ballen. William Waterman, Rivonia, South Africa, 1994; Quartet, London 1994; St. Martin's, New York, 1996

Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa. Introduction by Roger Ballen. Clifton, Cape Town, South Africa, 1986

Boyhood. Introduction by Roger Ballen. Chelsea House, New York, 1979

Catalogues

Lines, Marks, and Drawings: Through the Lens of Roger Ballen. Foreword by Johnnetta Betsch Cole; introduction by Craig Allen Subler; essay by Robert JC Young; interview with the artist by Craig Allen Subler with Christine Mullen Kreamer. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 2013

Roger Ballen: Transfigurações, Fotografias, 1968–2012. Daniella Géo, curator. Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012

Seeing Eye. Brundyn and Gonsalves (Catalogue No. 15), Cape Town, South Africa, 2012

Roger Ballen: Shadow Land: Photographs, 1983–2011. Manchester Art Gallery, England, 2012

Roger Ballen Playpen. North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, 2012

Roger Ballen. Modern Art Projects (MAP), Richmond, South Africa, 2011

Roger Ballen Photographs, 1969–2009. Edited by Ulrich Pohlmann and Christin Krause. Kerber, Millerton, New York, 2010

Reconstruções: Arte Contemporânea África do Sul / Reconstructions: Contemporary Art of South Africa. Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2011

Roger Ballen. Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa, 2010

Abitare Mondi / Living Worlds. Savignano Immagini Festival, Savignano sul Rubicone, Italy, 2010

Roger Ballen Retrospective. Centro de Arte La Regenta, Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain, 2010

Roger Ballen Storie. Museo di Riva del Garda, Italy, 2010

Roger Ballen Retrospektiva, 1982–2004: Mid-career Retrospective and Boarding House. Gelrija Fotografia, Ljubjana, Slovenia, 2009

Festival Punto Aparte, Bendita Locura. Italy, 2009

Darkroom: Photography and New Media in South Africa since 1950. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2009

Roger Ballen: Boarding House. Ontario College of Art and Design, Professional Gallery, Ontario, Canada, 2009

Roger Ballen, 1982–2009. La Triennale di Milano, 2009

FILMS, AWARDS, AND EXHIBITIONS SINCE 2009

Films

The Asylum. Saskia Vredeveld in association with Roger Ballen. Peacefield Films, Amsterdam, 2012

I Fink U Freeky, music video with Die Antwoord. Produced by Roger Ballen and Ninja, 2012

Memento Mori. Saskia Vredeveld, Netherlands Film Fund and Peacefield Films, 2005

Selfportrait, Roger Ballen. Netherlands Broadcasting Cooperation, 2002

Platteland: Images from Rural South Africa. ITV Television, South Bank Show, London, 1995

Dorps: Small Towns of South Africa, documentary on Ballen's book of the same name. South African Broadcasting Corporation, 1986

Awards

Best Music Video (*I Fink U Freeky*), 20th anniversary event of the Plus Camerimage International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography, Bydgoszcz, Poland, 2012

Best Music Video (*I Fink U Freeky*), 20th Short Vila do Conde International Film Festival, Portugal, 2012

Lucie Award, finalist for solo exhibition of the year (*Roger Ballen: Photographs, 1982–2009,* George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York), 2010

Best Photographic Book of the Year, Honourable Mention (*Boarding House*), PhotoEspana, Madrid, Spain, 2009

Top 10 Exhibitions, Matthew Higgs, Artforum, December 2004

UNICEF Photo of the Year, Honourable Mention, 2004

Top 10 Exhibitions, Vince Aletti, Artforum, December 2002

Photographer of the Year, Rencontres d'Arles, July 2002

Best Documentary Title, Best Photography Books of 2001, Photo-eye

UNICEF Photo of the Year, Special Mention, 2001

Best Photographic Book of the Year (*Outland*), PhotoEspana, Madrid, Spain, 2001

Best Solo Exhibition, Sani Festival, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2000

Solo Exhibition Venues

2014 (Forthcoming)

Fotografiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden

Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Italy

2013

National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Photoink, New Delhi, India

Palm Springs Art Museum, California

Westlicht, Schauplatz für Fotografie, Vienna, Austria

Fotofestiwal, Art Center Łódź, Poland

Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, Italy

Perm Museum of Contemporary Art, Russia

2012

Erdmann Contemporary and The Photographers Gallery za, Cape Town, South Africa

Kleinschmidt Fine Photogrpahs, Wiesbaden, Germany

Guate Festival, Guatemala de la Asunción, Guatemala

Manchester Art Museum, England

Marta Herford, Herford, Germany

Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland

Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janerio, Brazil

Rosphoto, Saint Petersburg, Russia

Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel

2011

Fahey/Klein Gallery, Los Angeles, California

Fondazione Terre Medicee, Seravezza, Italy

Galerie Alex Daniëls—Reflex Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Galleri Tom Christoffersen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Mannheim Ludwigshafen Heidelberg, Germany

McDermott Gallery, Siem Reap, Cambodia

Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal, Canada

Museum Het Domein, Sittard, The Netherlands

2010

Bozar, Brussels, Belgium

Centro de Arte La Regenta, Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain

Comune di Arco/Galleria Civica, Italy

Savignano Immagini Festival, Savignano sul Rubicone, Italy

Foundazione Terre Medicee, Seravezza, Italy

Galería Max Estrella, Madrid, Spain

Galeria Senda, Barcelona, Spain

Galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris, France

Galerie Sabine Knust, Munich, Germany

Gallery Photographer RU, Moscow, Russia

George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York

Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

Jackson Fine Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Lismore Regional Gallery, Australia

Galerie Photonet, Wiesbaden, Germany

Rooke Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa

Sammlungsleiter Fotomuseum, Munich, Germany

Stenersenmuseet, Oslo, Norway

Sydney Biennale, Australia

Ubuntu, Berlin, Germany

Ubuntu, Salzburg, Austria

University of the Orange Free State, South Africa

2009

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Aura Gallery, Shanghai, China

City Museum of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Gagosian Gallery, New York, New York

Galerie Wolfsen, Aalborg, Denmark

Galerija Fotografija, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Hamiltons, London, England

Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, Italy

Johnen Galerie, Berlin, Germany

National Library of Australia, Canberra

Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto, Canada

La Triennale di Milano, Italy

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

University of Pretoria, South Africa

Group Exhibitions

2013

Secession Secession, Fitzroy Gallery, New York, New York

Shadow Chamber, Fototropía, Guatemala City, Guatemala

2012

Traumwelten—In the Court of the King of Dreams, Kunsthalle HGN, Duderstadt, Germany

The Art of Photography Show, San Diego Art Institute, California

Doubles, Dualities & Doppelgängers, The Center for Photography at Woodstock, New York

Cruel & Tender, Tim Melville Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

Confounding: Contemporary Photography, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

The Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life, International Center of Photography, New York, New York

Play, Turnhout, Belgium

Seeing Eye, Brundyn and Gonsalves, Cape Town, South Africa

Outsiders, naïve and autodidacts, Haifa Museum of Art, Israel

2011

REAL, Fotogalerie Wien, Austria

The Kasper Collection of Drawings and Photographs, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, New York

2010

Reconstruções: Arte Contemporânea África do Sul / Reconstructions: Contemporary Art of South Africa, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore, India

(Out of) Control, BIP2010, 7th International Biennial of Photography and Visual Arts, Cultural Centre of Liège–Les Chiroux, Belgium

Photography from Heaven and Hell, 7th Lane, Ellen-K Fine Art Photography, Oslo, Norway

2009

Wszystkie stworzenia duże i małe / All Creatures Great and Small, Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki (Zachęta National Gallery of Art), Warsaw, Poland

MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, California

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama

Brooklyn Museum, New York, New York

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

Durban Art Gallery, Durban, South Africa

Fotomuseum München, Germany

George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester, New York

Hasselblad, Göteborg, Sweden

High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia

Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa

Johannesburg Art Museum, South Africa

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark

Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris, France

Manchester Art Gallery, England

Musée de la Photographie à Charleroi, Belgium

Musée de l'Elysée, Lausanne, Switzerland

Museet for Fotokunst, Odense, Denmark

Museo nazionale della Fotografia, Brescia, Italy

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, California

Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

National Museum of Film and Photography (now National Media Museum), Bradford, England

Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas

State Museum of Russia, Moscow

Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Tate Britain, London, England

Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

About the Authors

CRAIG ALLEN SUBLER is an artist and the Olson Professor at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, where he was director of the UMKC Gallery of Art for more than twenty years. He participated in the 2010 Dak'Art (9th Biennial of Contemporary African Art in Dakar, Senegal) as a visiting artist and has been an artist in residence at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica in Venice, Italy (2009), and the Skopelos Foundation for the Arts in Greece (2008). In 2006, Subler participated in the Lighton International Artists Exchange Program to Mali, West Africa, and received an award from the Charlotte Street Foundation in 2005. As the director of the UMKC Gallery of Art, Subler developed a broad range of exhibitions there, from the work of William Christenberry, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg to the fantasy coffins of Ghana, African headwear, and Turkish nomadic weaving.

CHRISTINE MULLEN KREAMER is deputy director and chief curator at the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution. She received her doctoral degree from Indiana University, Bloomington. Her exhibitions and publications explore African art, ritual, gender, systems of knowledge, and museum practice. She has researched in Togo and South Africa and worked on museum-training projects in Ghana and Vietnam. In addition to articles and essays on traditional and contemporary African arts and museum studies, Kreamer's coauthored publications include *African Cosmos: Stellar Arts* (2012), *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in African Art* (2007), and *African Vision: The Walt Disney–Tishman African Art Collection* (2007).

ROBERT JC YOUNG is Julius Silver Professor of English and Comparative Literature at New York University. His writings range across the fields of cultural history, literature, philosophy, photography, psychoanalysis, and translation studies. Publications include *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (2008), *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001), *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (1995), and *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990). Young is editor of the quarterly *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. His work has been translated into more than twenty languages. For more information, visit www.robertjcyoung.com.

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